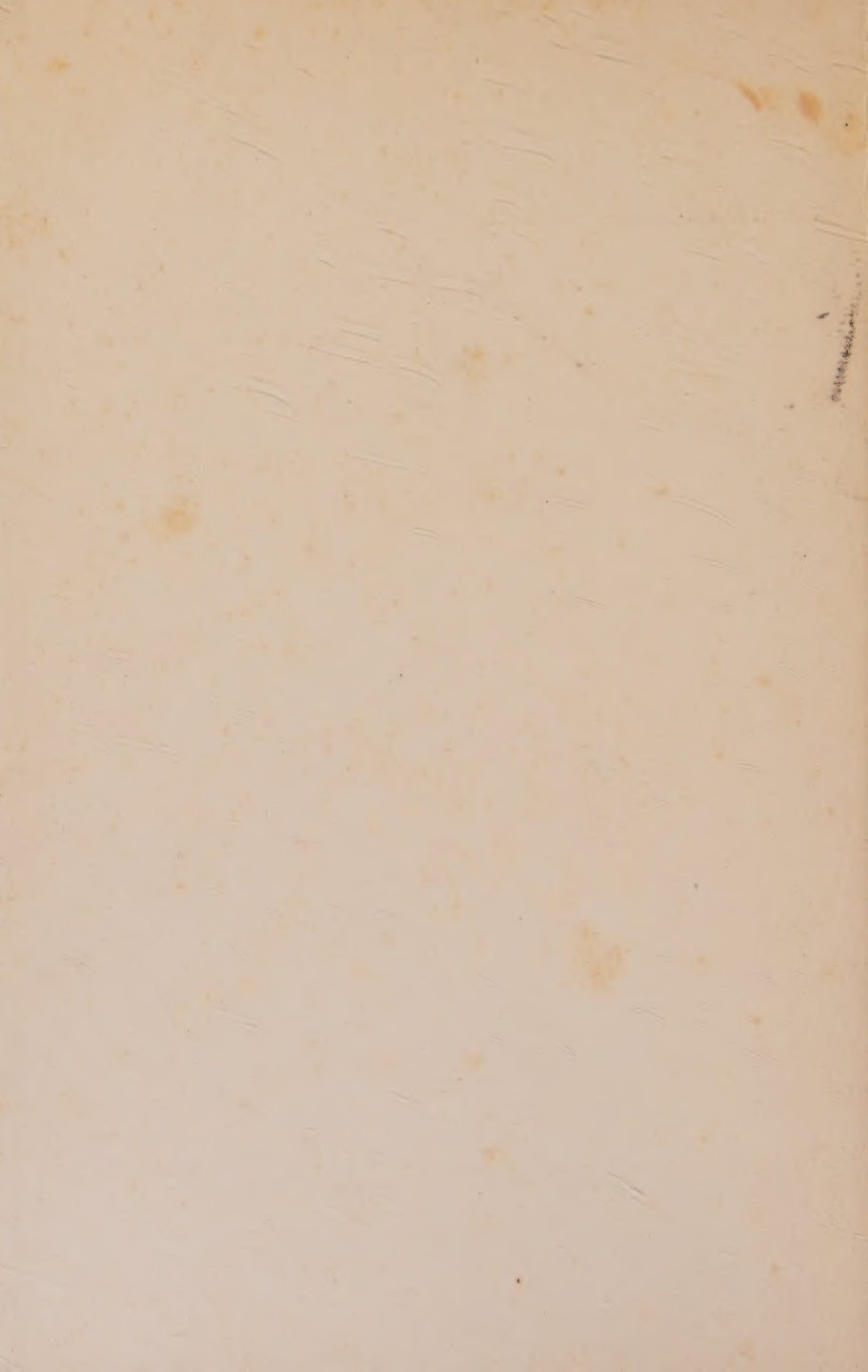


SEFFY



JOHN LUTHER LONG



Elizabeth L. Damon


12.00 Antia

6.00 Disc


4.00 KCPL

SEFFY





SEFFY




A LITTLE COMEDY OF COUNTRY MANNERS


BY
JOHN LUTHER LONG

AUTHOR OF
MADAME BUTTERFLY
NAUGHTY NAN, ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
C.D. WILLIAMS



INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL
COMPANY PUBLISHERS



COPYRIGHT 1905
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

NOVEMBER

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOKBINDERS AND PRINTERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

TO ALL WHO HAVE COURTED—
FOR REMEMBRANCE;
TO ALL WHO WILL COURT—
AN EXAMPLE;
TO ALL WHO HAVE NEVER COURTED—
IN PITY;
TO ALL WHO WILL NEVER COURT—
WITH TEARS

SEFFY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I HOW A SIDEWISE DOG TROTS . . .	1
II WHAT HAVE FEELINGS GOT TO DO WITH COW PASTURE ?	22
III BUT SALLY WAS THE ANGEL	32
IV SUPPOSE SHE HAD GREASED HER HAIR ?	35
V SEFFY'S SITTING UP—AND DOWN AGAIN	49
VI THE CLOTHES-PIN CURE	54
VII THE POISON SPRING IN THE COTTON WOODS	68
VIII THE WHITE SIGNAL WHICH MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN BLACK	77
IX IT WAS SEFFY WHO WAS SACKED . . .	84
X THE HUGE FIST OF THE FARMER . . .	91
XI WHEN SPRING CAME	102
XII THE KISS LIKE SEFFY'S	105
XIII ONE BLOW FOR THAT TO SEFFY . . .	109
XIV FOR SEFFY'S SAKE	115
XV SHALL SEFFY ENTER AT THIS CUE ? .	129

ILLUSTRATIONS

SALLY

Frontispiece

"YERE HE GOES TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER!
WHAT'S BID? GOING—GOING—" 14

"I SHALL NEVER KISS NO ONE BUT YOU,
NO MORE" 46

IF SHE HAD OBEYED ONLY HER HEART SHE
WOULD HAVE FLUNG HER ARMS AROUND
HIM 70

"THANK YOU, MR. BAUMGARTNER, I'M SUITED" 88

"I'M SORRY I'M YOU' DADDY, I AM, BEGOSHENS!" 98

"I'M HER GARDEEN!" HE CRIED AS HE STRUCK 112

SHE SLIPPED TO THE FLOOR AND KNELT AT HIS
FEET 136

SEFFY

SEFFY

I

HOW A SIDEWISE DOG TROTS

The place was the porch of the store, the time was about ten o'clock in the morning of a summer day, the people were the amiable loafers — and Old Baumgartner. The person he was discoursing about was his son Sephenijah. I am not sure that the name was not the ripe fruit of his father's fancy — with, perhaps, the Scriptural suggestion which is likely to be present in the affairs of a Pennsylvania-German — whether a communicant or not — even if he live in Maryland.

“Yas — always last; expecial at funerals and weddings. Except his own — he's sure to be on time at his own funeral. Right out in front! Hah? But sometimes he

misses his wedding. Why, I knowed a feller — yous all knowed him, begoshens! — that didn't git there tell another feller'd married her — 'bout more'n a year afterward. Wasn't it more'n a year, boys? Yas — Bill Eisenkrout. Or, now, was it his brother — Baltzer Iron-Cabbage? Seems to me now like it was Baltz. Somesing wiss a B at the front end, anyhow."

Henry Wasserman diffidently intimated that there was a curious but satisfactory element of safety in being last — a "fastnacht" in their language, in fact. Those in front were the ones usually hurt in railroad accidents, Alexander Althoff remembered.

"Safe?" cried the speaker. "Of course! But for why — say, for why?" Old Baumgartner challenged defiantly.

No one answered and he let several impressive minutes intervene.

"You don't know! Hang you, none of yous knows! Well — because he ain't there when anysing occurs — always a little late!"

They agreed with him by a series of sage nods.

“But, fellers, the worst is about courting. It’s no way to be always late. Everybody else gits there first, and it’s nossing for the fastnacht but weeping and wailing and gnashing of the teeth. And mebbby the other feller gits considerable happiness — and a good farm.”

There was complaint in the old man’s voice, and they knew that he meant his own son Seffy. To add to their embarrassment, this same son was now appearing over the Lustich Hill — an opportune moment for a pleasing digression. For you must be told early concerning Old Baumgartner’s longing for certain lands, tenements and hereditaments — using his own phrase — which were not his own, but which adjoined his. It had passed into a proverb of the vicinage; indeed, though the property in question belonged to one Sarah Pressel, it was known colloquially as “Baumgartner’s Yearn.”

And the reason of it was this: Between his own farm and the public road, (and the railroad station when it came), lay the fairest meadow-land farmer's eye had ever rested upon. (I am speaking again for the father of Seffy and with his hyperbole.) Save in one particular, it was like an enemy's beautiful territory lying between one's less beautiful own and the open sea — keeping one a poor inlander who is mad for the seas — whose crops must either pass across the land of his adversary and pay tithes to him, or go by long distances around him at the cost of greater tithes to the soulless owners of the turnpikes — who aggravatingly fix a gate each way to make their tithes more sure. So, I say, it was like having the territory of his enemy lying between him and deep water — save, as I have also said, in one particular, to wit: that the owner — the Sarah Pressel I have mentioned — was not Old Baumgartner's enemy.

In fact, they were tremendous friends.

And it was by this friendship — and one other thing which I mean to mention later — that Old Baumgartner hoped, before he died, to attain the wish of his life, and see, not only the Elysian pasture-field, but the whole of the adjoining farm, with the line fences down, a part of his. The other thing I promised to mention as an aid to this ambition — was Seffy. And, since the said Sarah was of nearly the same age as Seffy, perhaps I need not explain further, except to say that the only obstruction the old man could see now to acquiring title by marriage was — Seffy himself. He was, and always had been, afraid of girls — especially such aggressive, flirtatious, pretty and tempestuous girls as this Sarah.

These things, however, were hereditary with the girl. It was historical, in fact, that, during the life of Sarah's good-looking father, so importunate had been Old Baumgartner for the purchase of at least the meadow — he could not have ventured more at that time

— and so obstinate had been the father of the present owner — (he had red hair precisely as his daughter had) — that they had come to blows about it to the discomfiture of Old Baumgartner; and, afterward, they did not speak. Yet, when the loafers at the store laughed, Baumgartner swore that he would, nevertheless, have that pasture before he died.

But, then, as if fate, too, were against him, the railroad was built, and its station was placed so that the Pressel farm lay directly between it and him, and of course the “life” went more and more in the direction of the station — left him more and more “out of it” — and made him poorer and poorer, and Pressel richer and richer. And, when the store laughed at *that*, Baumgartner swore that he would possess half of the farm before he died; and as Pressel and his wife died, and Seffy grew up, and as he noticed the fondness of the little red-headed girl for his little tow-headed boy, he added to his adjuration that he would be harrowing that whole farm

before *he* died,— *without paying a cent for it!*

But both Seffy and Sally had grown to a marriageable age without anything happening. Seffy had become inordinately shy, while the coquettish Sally had accepted the attentions of Sam Pritz, the clerk at the store, as an antagonist more worthy of her, and in a fashion which sometimes made the father of Seffy swear and lose his temper — with Seffy. Though, of course, in the final disposition of the matter, he was sure that no girl so nice as Sally would marry such a person as Sam Pritz, with no extremely visible means of support — a salary of four dollars a week, and an odious reputation for liquor. And it was for these things, all of which were known (for Baumgartner had not a single secret) that the company at the store detected the personal equation in Old Baumgartner's communications.

Seffy had almost arrived by this time, and Sally was in the store! With Sam! The situ-

ation was highly dramatic. But the old man consummately ignored this complication and directed attention to his son. For him, the molasses-tapper did not exist. The fact is he was overjoyed. Seffy, for once in his life, would be on time! He would do the rest.

“Now, boys, chust look at ’em! Dogged if they ain’t bosed like one another! How’s the proferb? Birds of a feather flock wiss one another? I dunno. Anyhow, Sef flocks wiss Betz constant. And they understand one another good. Trotting like a sidewise dog of a hot summer’s day!” And he showed the company, up and down the store-porch, just how a sidewise dog would be likely to trot on a hot summer day — and then laughed joyously.

If there had been an artist eye to see they would have been well worth its while — Seffy and the mare so affectionately disparaged. And, after all, I am not sure that the speaker himself had not an artist’s eye. For a spring pasture, or a fallow upland, or a drove of

goodly cows deep in his clover, I know he had. (Perhaps you, too, have?) And this was his best mare and his only son.

The big bay, clad in broad-banded harness, soft with oil and glittering with brasses, was shambling indolently down the hill, resisting her own momentum by the diagonal motion the old man had likened to a dog's sidewise trot. The looped trace-chains were jingling a merry dithyramb, her head was nodding, her tail swaying, and Seffy, propped by his elbow on her broad back, one leg swung between the hames, the other keeping time on her ribs, was singing:

“ ‘ I want to be an angel
And with the angels stand,
A crown upon my forehead
A harp within my hand — ’ ”

His adoring father chuckled. “ I wonder what for kind of anchel he'd make, anyhow? And Betz — they'll have to go together. Say, I wonder if it *is* horse-anchels? ”

No one knew; no one offered a suggestion.

“Well, it ought to be. Say — he ken perform circus wiss ol’ Betz!”

They expressed their polite surprise at this for perhaps the hundredth time.

“Yas — they have a kind of circus-ring in the barnyard. He stands on one foot then on another, and on his hands wiss his feet kicking, and then he says words — like hokey-pokey — and Betz she kicks up behind and throws him off in the dung and we all laugh — happy efer after — Betz most of all!”

After the applause he said:

“I guess I’d better wake ’em up! What you sink?”

They one and all thought he had. They knew he would do it, no matter what they thought. His method, as usual, was his own. He stepped to the adjoining field, and, selecting a clod with the steely polish of the plow-share upon it, threw it at the mare. It struck her on the flank. She gathered her feet under her in sudden alarm, then slowly relaxed,

looked slyly for the old man, found him, and understanding, suddenly wheeled and ambled off home, leaving Seffy prone on the ground as her part of the joke.

The old man brought Seffy in triumph to the store-porch.

“Chust stopped you afore you got to be a anchel!” he was saying. “We couldn’t bear to sink about you being a anchel — an’ wiss the anchels stand — a harp upon your forehead, a crown within your hand, I expect — when it’s corn-planting time.”

Seffy grinned cheerfully, brushed off the dust and contemplated his father’s watch — held accusingly against him. Old Baumgartner went on gaily.

“About an inch and a half apast ten! Seffy, I’m glad you ain’t breaking your reputation for being fastnachich. Chust about a quarter of an inch too late for the prize wiss flour on its hair and arms and its frock pinned up to show its new petticoat! Uhu! If I had such a nice petticoat —” he

imitated the lady in question, to the tremendous delight of the gentle loafers.

Seffy stared a little and rubbed some dust out of his eyes. He was pleasant but dull.

“Yassir, Sef, if you’d a-got yere at a inch and a quarter apast! Now Sam’s got her. Down in the cellar a-licking molasses together! Doggone if Sam don’t git eferysing — except his due bills. He don’t want to be no anchel tell he dies. He’s got fun enough yere — but Seffy — you’re like the flow of molasses in January — at courting.”

This oblique suasion made no impression on Seffy. It is doubtful if he understood it at all. The loafers began to smile. One laughed. The old man checked him with a threat of personal harm.

“Hold on there, Jefferson Dafis Busby,” he chid. “I don’t allow no one to laugh at my Seffy — except chust me — account I’m his daddy. It’s a fight-word the next time you do it.”

Mr. Busby straightened his countenance.

“He don’t seem to notice — nor keer — ’bout gals — do he?”

No one spoke.

“No, durn him, he ain’t no good. Say — what’ll you give for him, hah? Yere he goes to the highest bidder — for richer, for poorer, for better, for worser, up and down, in and out, swing your partners — what’s bid? He ken plow as crooked as a mule’s hind leg, sleep hard as a ’possum in winter-time, eat like a snake, git left efery time — but he ken ketch fish. They wait on him. What’s bid?”

No one would hazard a bid.

“Yit a minute,” shouted the old fellow, pulling out his bull’s-eye watch again, “what’s bid? Going — going — all done — going —”

“A dollar!”

The bid came from behind him, and the voice was beautiful to hear. A gleam came into the old man’s eyes as he heard it. He deliberately put the watch back in its pocket,

put on his spectacles, and turned, as if she were a stranger.

"Gone!" he announced then. "Who's the purchaser? Come forwards and take away you' property. What's the name, please?" Then he pretended to recognize her. "Oach! Sally! Well, that's lucky! He goes in good hands. He's sound and kind, but needs the whip." He held out his hand for the dollar.

It was the girl of whom he had spoken accurately as a prize. Her sleeves were turned up as far as they would go, revealing some soft lace-trimmed whiteness, and there *was* flour on her arms. Some patches of it on her face gave a petal-like effect to her otherwise aggressive color. The pretty dress was pinned far enough back to reveal the prettier petticoat — plus a pair of trimly-clad ankles.

Perhaps these were neither the garments nor the airs in which every farmer-maiden did her baking. But then, Sally was no ordi-



nary farmer-maiden. She was all this, it is true, but she was, besides, grace and color and charm itself. And if she chose to bake in such attire — or, even, if she chose to pretend to do so, where was the churl to say her nay, even though the flour was part of a deliberate “make up”? Certainly he was not at the store that summer morning.

And Seffy was there. Her hair escaped redness by only a little. But that little was just the difference between ugliness and beauty. For, whether Sally were beautiful or not — about which we might contend a bit — her hair was, and perhaps that is the reason why it was nearly always uncovered — or, possibly, again, because it was so much uncovered was the reason it was beautiful. It seemed to catch some of the glory of the sun. Her face had a few freckles and her mouth was a trifle too large. But, in it were splendid teeth.

In short, by the magic of brilliant color and natural grace she narrowly escaped being ex-

tremely handsome — in the way of a sun-burned peach, or a maiden's-blush apple. And even if you should think she were not handsome, you would admit that there was an indescribable rustic charm about her. She was like the aroma of the hay-fields, or the woods, or a field of daisies, or dandelions.

The girl, laughing, surrendered the money, and the old man, taking an arm of each, marched them peremptorily away.

“Come to the house and git his clothes. Eferysing goes in — stofepipe hat, butterfly necktie, diamond pin, tooth-brush, hair-oil, razor and soap.”

They had got far enough around the corner to be out of sight of the store, during this gaiety, and the old man now shoved Seffy and the girl out in front of him, linked their arms, and retreated to the rear.

“What Sephenijah P. Baumgartner, Senior, hath j'ined together, let nobody put athunder, begoshens!” he announced.

The proceeding appeared to be painful to

Seffy, but not to Sally. She frankly accepted the situation and promptly put into action its opportunities for coquetry. She begged him, first, with consummate aplomb, to aid her in adjusting her parcels more securely, insisting upon carrying them herself, and it would be impossible to describe adequately her allures. The electrical touches, half-caress, half-defiance; the confidential whisperings, so that the wily old man in the rear might not hear; the surges up against him; the recoveries — only to surge again — these would require a mechanical contrivance which reports not only speech but action — and even this might easily fail, so subtle was it all!

“Sef — Seffy, I thought it was his old watch he was auctioning off. I wanted it for — for — a nest-egg! aha-ha-ha! You must excuse me.”

“You wouldn’t ’a’ bid at all if you’d knowed it was me, I reckon,” said Seffy.

“Yes, I would,” declared the coquette.

“I’d rather have you than any nest-egg in the whole world — any two of ’em!” — and when he did not take his chance — “if they were made of gold!”

But then she spoiled it.

“It’s worse fellows than you, Seffy.” The touch of coquetry was but too apparent.

“And better,” said Seffy, with a lump in his throat. “I know I ain’t no good with girls — and I don’t care!”

“Yes!” she assented wickedly. “There *are* better ones.”

“Sam Pritz —”

Sally looked away, smiled, and was silent.

“Sulky Seffy!” she finally said.

“If he does stink of salt mackerel, and ’most always drunk!” Seffy went on bitterly. “He’s nothing but a molasses-tapper!”

Sally began to drift further away and to sing. Calling Pritz names was of no consequence — except that it kept Seffy from making love to her while he was doing it — which seemed foolish to Sally. The old man

came up and brought them together again.

“Oach! go ’long and make lofe some more. I like to see it. I expect I am an old fool, but I like to see it — it’s like ol’ times — yas, and if you don’t look out there, Seffy, I’ll take a hand myself — yassir! go ’long!”

He drew them very close together, each looking the other way. Indeed he held them there for a moment, roughly.

Seffy stole a glance at Sally. He wanted to see how she was taking his father’s odiously intimate suggestion. But it happened that Sally wanted to see how he was taking it. She laughed with the frankest of joy as their eyes met.

“Seffy — I *do* — like you,” said the coquette. “And you ought to know it. You imp!”

Now this was immensely stimulating to the bashful Seffy.

“I like *you*,” he said — “ever since we was babies.”

“Sef — I don’t believe you. Or you

wouldn't waste your time so — about Sam Pritz!"

"Er — Sally — where you going to to-night?" Seffy meant to prove himself.

And Sally answered, with a little fright at the sudden aggressiveness she had procured.

"Nowheres that *I* know of."

"Well — may I set up with you?"

The pea-green sunbonnet could not conceal the amazement and then the radiance which shot into Sally's face.

"Set — up — with — me!"

"Yes!" said Seffy, almost savagely.

"That's what I said."

"Oh, I — I guess so! Yes! of course!" she answered variously, and rushed off home.

"You know I own you," she laughed back, as if she had not been sufficiently explicit. "I paid for you! Your pappy's got the money! I'll expect my property to-night."

"Yas!" shouted the happy old man, "and begoshens! it's a reg'ler bargain! Ain't it, Seffy? You her property — real estate,

hereditaments and tenements." And even Seffy was drawn into the joyous laughing conceit of it! Had he not just done the bravest thing of his small life?

"Yes!" he cried after the fascinating Sally. "For sure and certain, to-night!"

"It's a bargain!" cried she.

"For better or worser, richer or poorer, up an' down, in an' out, chassez right and left! Aha-ha-ha! Aha-ha-ha! But, Seffy," — and the happy father turned to the happy son and hugged him, "don't you efer forget that she's a feather-head and got a bright red temper like her daddy! And they both work mighty bad together sometimes. When you get her at the right place onct — well, nail her down — hand and feet — so's she can't git away. When she gits mad her little brain evaporates, and if she had a knife she'd go round stabbing her best friends — that's the only sing that safes her — yas, and us! — no knife. If she had a knife it would be funerals following her all the time."

II

WHAT HAVE FEELINGS GOT TO DO WITH COW- PASTURE?

They advanced together now, Seffy's father whistling some tune that was never heard before on earth, and, with his arm in that of his son, they watched Sally bounding away. Once more, as she leaped a fence, she looked laughingly back. The old man whistled wildly out of tune. Seffy waved a hand!

"Now you shouting, Seffy! Shout ag'in!"

"I didn't say a word!"

"Well — it ain't too late! Go on!"

Now Seffy understood and laughed with his father.

"Nice gal, Sef — Seffy!"

"Yes!" admitted Seffy with reserve.

"Healthy."

Seffy agreed to this, also.

"No doctor-bills!" his father amplified.

Seffy said nothing.

"Entire orphen."

"She's got a granny!"

"Yas," chuckled the old man at the way his son was drifting into the situation — thinking about granny! — "but Sally owns *the farm!*"

"Uhu!" said Seffy, whatever that might mean.

"And Sally's the boss!"

Silence.

"And granny won't object to any one Sally marries, anyhow — she dassent! She'd git licked!"

"Who said anything about marrying?"

Seffy was speciously savage now — as any successful wooer might be.

"Nobody but me, sank you!" said the old man with equally specious meekness. "Look how she ken jump a six-rail fence. Like a three-year filly! She's a nice gal, Seffy —

and the farms j'ine together — her pasture-field and our corn-field. And she's kissing her hand backwards! At me or you, Seffy?"

Seffy said he didn't know. And he did not return the kiss — though he yearned to.

"Well, I bet a dollar that the first initial of his last name is Sephanijah P. Baumgartner, *Junior*."

"Well!" said Seffy with a great flourish, "I'm going to set up with her to-night."

"Oach — git out, Sef!" — though he knew it.

"You'll see."

"No, I won't," said his father. "I wouldn't be so durn mean. Nossir!"

Seffy grinned at this subtle foolery, and his courage continued to grow.

"I'm going to wear my high hat!" he announced, with his nose quite in the air.

"No, Sef!" said the old man with a wonderful inflection, facing him about that he might look into his determined face. For it must be explained that the stovepipe hat, in

that day and that country, was dedicated only to the most momentous social occasions and that, consequently, gentlemen wore it to go courting.

“ Yes! ” declared Seffy again.

“ Bring forth the stovepipe,
The stovepipe, the stovepipe — ”

chanted Seffy’s frivolous father in the way of the Anvil Chorus.

“ And my butterfly necktie with — ”

“ Wiss the di’mond on? ” whispered his father.

They laughed in confidence of their secret. Seffy, the successful wooer, was thawing out again. The diamond was not a diamond at all — the Hebrew who sold it to Seffy had confessed as much. But he also swore that if it were kept in perfect polish no one but a diamond merchant could tell the difference. Therefore, there being no diamond merchant anywhere near, and the jewel being always immaculate, Seffy presented it as a diamond

and had risen perceptibly in the opinion of the vicinage.

“ And — and — and — Sef — Seffy, what you goin’ to *do*? ”

“ Do? ”

Seffy had been absorbed in what he was going to wear.

“ Yas — yas — that’s the most important.” He encircled Seffy’s waist and gently squeezed it. “ Oh, of *course*! Hah? But what *yit*? ”

I regret to say that Seffy did not understand.

“ Seffy,” he said impressively, “ you haf’ tol’ me what you goin’ to wear. It ain’t much. The weather’s yit pooty col’ nights. But I ken stand it if you ken — God knows about Sally! Now, what you goin’ to *do* — that’s the conuntrum I ast you! ”

Still it was not clear to Seffy.

“ Why — what I’m a-going to do, hah? Why — whatever occurs.”

“ Gosh-a’mighty! And nefer say a word

or do a sing to help the occurrences along? Goshens! What a setting-up! Why — say — Seffy, what you set up *for?* ”

Seffy did not exactly know. He had never hoped to practise the thing — in that sublimely militant phase.

“ What do *you* think? ”

“ Well, Sef — plow straight to her heart. I wisht I had your chance. I’d show you a other-guess kind a setting-up — yassir! Make your mouth warter and your head swim, begoshens! Why, that Sally’s just like a young stubble-field; got to be worked constant, and plowed deep, and manured heafy, and mebbly drained wiss blind ditches, and crops changed constant, and kep’ a-going thataway — constant — constant — so’s the weeds can’t git in her. Then you ken put her in wheat after a while and git your money back.”

This drastic metaphor had its effect. Seffy began to understand. He said so.

“ Now look here, Seffy,” his father went

on more softly, "when you git to this — and this — and this," — he went through his pantomime again, and it included a progressive caressing to the kissing point — "well, chust when you bose comfortable — hah? — mebbly on one cheer, what I know — it's so long sence I done it myself — when you bose comfortable, ast her — chust ast her — aham! — what she'll take for the pasture-field! She owns you bose and she can't use bose you and the pasture. A bird in the hand is worth seferal in another feller's — not so?"

But Seffy only stopped and stared at his father. This, again, he did *not* understand.

"You know well enough I got no money to buy no pasture-field," said he.

"Gosh-a'mighty!" said the old man joyfully, making as if he would strike Seffy with his huge fist — a thing he often did. "And ain't got nossing to trade?"

"Nothing except the mare!" said the boy.

"Say — ain't you got no feelings, you idiot?"

“ Oh —— ” said Seffy. And then: “ But what’s feelings got to do with cow-pasture? ”

“ Oach! No wonder he wants to be an anchel, and wiss the anchels stand — holding sings in his hands and on his head! He’s too good for this wile world. He’d linger shif-ering on the brink and fear to launch away all his durn life — if some one didn’t push him in. So here goes!”

This was spoken to the skies, apparently, but now he turned to his son again.

“ Look a-yere, you young dummer-ux,* feelings is the same to gals like Sally, as money is to you and me. You ken buy potatoes wiss ’em! Do you understand? ”

Seffy said that he did, now.

“ Well, then, I’fe tried to *buy* that pasture-field a sousand times —— ”

Seffy started.

“ Yas, that’s a little bit a lie — mebbby a dozen times. And at last Sally’s daddy said he’d lick me if I efer said pasture-field ag’in,

* Dumb-ox — a term of reproach.

and I said it ag'in and he licked me! He was a big man — and red-headed yit, like Sally. Now, look a-yere — *you* ken git that pasture-field wissout money and wissout price — except you' dam' feelings which ain't no other use. Sally won't lick *you* — if she is bigger — don't be a-skeered. You got tons of feelin's you ain't got no other use for — don't waste 'em — they're good green money, and we'll git efen wiss Sally's daddy for lickin' me yit — and somesing on the side! Huh?"

At last it was evident that Seffy fully understood, and his father broke into that discordant whistle once more.

"A gal that ken jump a six-rail fence — and wissout no running start — don't let her git apast you!"

"Well, I'm going to set up with her to-night," said Seffy again, with a huge ahem. And the tune his father whistled as he opened the door for him sounded something like "I want to be an angel."

“But not to buy no pasture-land!”
warned Seffy.

“Oach, no, of course not!” agreed his wily
old father. “That’s chust one of my durn
jokes. But I expect I’ll take the fence down
to-morrow! Say, Sef, you chust marry the
gal. I’ll take keer the fence!”

III

BUT SALLY WAS THE ANGEL

It took Seffy a long time to array himself as he had threatened. And when it was all done you wouldn't have known him — you wouldn't have cared to know him. For his fine yellow hair was changed to an ugly brown by the patent hair-oil with which he had dressed it — and you would not have liked its fragrance, I trust. Bergamot, I think it was. His fine young throat was garroted within a starched standing collar, his feet were pinched in creaking boots, his hands close-gauntleted in buckskin gloves, and he altogether incomparable, uncomfortable, and triumphant.

Down stairs his father paced the floor, watch in hand. From time to time he would

call out the hour, like a watchman on a minaret. At last:

“Look a-yere, Seffy, it’s about two inches apast sefen — and by the time you git there — say, *nefer* gif another feller a chance to git there afore you or to leave after you!”

Seffy descended at that moment with his hat poised in his left hand.

His father dropped his watch and picked it up.

Both stood at gaze for a moment.

“Sunder, Sef! You as beautiful as the sun, moon and stars — and as stinky as seferal apothecary shops. Yere, take the watch and git along — so’s you haf some time wiss you — now git along! You late a’ready. Goshens! You wass behind time when you wass born! Yas, your mammy wass disap’nted in you right at first. You wass seventy-six hours late! But now you reformed — sank God! I always knowed it wass a cure for it, but I didn’t know it wass anysing as nice as Sally.”

Seffy issued forth to his first conquest — lighted as far as the front gate by the fat lamp held in his father's hand.

“A — Sef — Seffy, shall I set up for you tell you git home?” he called into the dark.

“No!” shouted Seffy.

“Aha — aha — aha! That sounds *right*! Don't you forgit when you bose — well — comfortable — aha — ha-ha! Mebby on one cheer aha — ha-ha. And we'll bose take the fence down to-morrow. Mebby all three!”

IV

SUPPOSE SHE HAD GREASED HER HAIR?

Seffy sauntered confidently up The Hill of Delight upon which Sally's house stood. When within sight of it he polished his hat on his sleeve, set the butterfly necktie straight, felt that the apochryphal diamond was safe, and marched up to the house — only to arrive a little later than a buggy from which Sam Pritz, he was certain, had extracted Sally. If it had not been for the thought of his father, which opportunely came, Seffy would have gone straight home — so did his heart fail him.

And then instantly there was another and better reason for staying. Sally had seen him. As he wavered — which she seemed to know — she came hurrying down upon him.

It was too late then, even if he had had the courage to retreat from such dear danger. She put her arm within his, and, leaning bewitchingly upon it, led him into the house, chattering fervidly — the most willing of captives to the most beguiling of captors. For Sally had put on all her witcheries for this night of nights.

Once within she added the charm of the accomplished amateur hostess — doing fascinating things which needed no doing — hovering about Seffy like the very spirit of a home — so that he had the intoxicating sense of difficulty in keeping from being entangled in her fluttering arms and garments. For his feet, unused to Elysium, *would* catch themselves in her whirling skirts — as if they knew better than he their ultimate destiny. All this was a splendid revelation to Seffy. He had never, in all his dreams of her (and they were legion!) fancied this soft and winning domesticity. It went to his head like alcohol — opium — ether — making it so

light and happy as to be quite useless to him.

So, when Sally finally took the tall hat and went to deposit it in the dark parlor, Seffy followed her, for no better reason than the things in the basin have for following the magnet. And, understanding this, Sally looked over her shoulder at him. And then, snuffing her conquest at a distance, she laughed and mercifully stopped for him to catch up, that she might presently surrender. She got his hand — to lead him. Only that!

“ You care a lot for — your hat, don’t you, Sef — Seffy? And you want to — to — see ” — he couldn’t see a thing — “ that I — that I — put it at a safe — place? ”

Still by the hand further into the darkness!

And Seffy honestly tried to prevaricate for her a “ Yes.” But he wasn’t thinking of the treasured hat at all, only the hand — that it was deliciously warm and soft and electrical. Suddenly she stopped very close to him. Only he was so dull! He did not know!

Heavens! when a girl *waits* for a youth to come close to her in the dark — what else can she mean? But Seffy actually did not know.

“ Sam’s over there! I — I — wish — he — wasn’t! ”

To whisper it she had to put one hand on his shoulder. How else could she whisper it? And she laughed a low bubbling laugh — half-confession — half-defiance — all invitation!

Seffy stooped to whisper back to her. Sally waited.

“ *I know!* ”

Only that! — Sally was disappointed. For it was the custom in that day and vicinage and in such circumstances to kiss a girl without fail. And could a girl do more than this by way of invitation? You must have perceived that Sally was learned in these matters. And you may be sure she did not forget Seffy’s bashfulness and his inexperience. But surely any one would understand *that* much

— in the dark! It argues heavily for the depth of Sally's affection for Seffy that she kept her temper, for the losing of which she was almost as famous as her father had been for losing his, and only sighed desperately. Any other girl would have left hope — and Seffy — behind. At that moment, happily, Sam was heard to move. She put her hand on Seffy's mouth as if some danger were there. And Seffy, by a sort of instinct, it must have been, kissed it!

“ Oh! —— ”

Both of Sally's hands went up in real surprise — and Seffy caught and kissed them both!

“ Oh! — oh! — oh! ”

She had to stuff her gay little handkerchief into her mouth to keep the joy within. After all, could this Seffy be playing 'possum? Was he deep? I don't know, any more than Sally, how it all happened — except that perhaps Seffy discovered himself suddenly brave in the darkness, and Sally quite defenseless —

but presently her head was on his shoulder, and his arm was around her, in quite the way his father had suggested and Sally had expected. And neither of them thought of him or a word he had said — concerning lands, tenements and hereditaments. Sally's hand crept up insidiously about Seffy's neck. But then it was fearfully withdrawn.

“*Please* don't grease your hair hereafter,” said Sally. But she kissed it!

“Hereafter! Hereafter!” Seffy's heart pounded.

“Suppose I'd grease *my* hair!” said Sally speciously.

The horror conjured up was factitious. Remember where her head was resting. But an alien element was now raised between them. Seffy moved away. Maids should not cavil even at oiled hair — so early in their courtship! More fascination was needed — perhaps only a soft cooing word.

“You — you wouldn't like that — would you?” — still meekly.

“No!” Seffy answered, puzzled. “My Sunday coat would git greased!”

“My sleeve did!”

She inspected a soiled sleeve — in the ray from the hall — which had no spot on it!

“I don’t care for the sleeve. It’ll wash out. But Sam — he sees every ——”

She laughed and was about to plunge recklessly back into his arms. But her hair *was* beautiful! And she had made it more so for him! He must see it! She plunged further into the ray from the hall lamp instead and flung it forward about her face. It clung and clustered there like an aureole. Seffy, in his brief life, he thought, had seen nothing more divine. She looked saucily up at him out of the tops of her eyes. His adoration made her very happy.

“There! ain’t that nicer than yourn?” She buried her fingers in the splendid mass, and pushed it into further disorder until it lay close — shining about her face.

“Oh, Sally,” said Seffy, approaching her

as if she were some goddess, "wear it that way always!"

The alien thing was gone! They were in rapport once more!

"They'd have me in an asylum in no time. But ——"

Somehow, Seffy's arms opened to invite her back and she came with a low reckless laugh. The wild sheaf of her hair lodged again close under his chin. He recklessly thrust his face into it. Its perfume in his nostrils and its movement against his skin were ineffable. He kissed it. Again it was the strange fashion of the cavalier — in those kisses! Where did he learn it?

"Oh, Sally, wear it always so!" he begged again. And — good heavens! — he put his lips down upon it once more!

"Just when you come to see me," murmured Sally to the lapel of his coat.

"Sally — Sally, you are an angel!" said Seffy.

And this one little word which came to dull

Seffy so happily out of his favorite song made the coquette very serious.

"Not an angel, Seffy, Sef — Seffy," she said with her head a little down. "I don't think you would like me to be such. I'm not! Angels never laugh, you know — nor love. And I want to do a lot of both. But — but — Seffy, I'd like to be something very nice — to *you*. What is the nicest thing a girl can be to you?"

"A sister!" ventured Seffy, who had never had one.

Sally shivered, then laughed. But she took herself away from Seffy.

The Pressel temper flamed a moment, and certain words began to form in her mind like "Fool!" and "Go!" and "Damn!" For, I think I haven't told you that Sally sometimes swore — in extreme circumstances. Her father had done so.

She spoke with that trifle of hard brutality which came out now and then.

"You know what they say at the store —

that I flirt and am not nice in other ways, and they're right. But I *do* want to be nice to *you*, though not a sister — quite. Ugh! And, you know, one thing they say is *true* — my temper. Look out for that! You must always take time to forgive me and let me ask to be forgiven."

Now, I beg to ask you whether an amende was ever more delicious — considering that much of what she said to and for Seffy was meant to and for herself alone? Indeed, before she got through with it, it had affected her quite as if Seffy had pleaded it, and her voice sank to its pretty mezzo, then quivered a bit, and she understood that she was answering herself!

"Seffy, I am awfully sorry!"

"For what, Sally?" asked Seffy.

Seffy, dull Seffy, really did not know for what. But there is something which God gives the dull, as well as the sprightly-witted, that outleaps words to comfort sorrow. And this Seffy had abundantly. It first expressed

itself in the strong young arms which again closed in utter silence upon the sorrowing one.

Presently (perhaps you have not forgotten how it is?) in the same silence, Seffy's lips found hers — not as the victor pounces upon the spoil of his conquest — but slowly, uncertainly, unconfidently — as if the lips were a saint's relics; and Sally waited, not as she had waited before, but in the knowledge that her hour had come, and that this kiss,— the first this youth had given to woman since his mother died in his infancy,— must not be received as others had been, but as sacredly as it came; and when it finally fell the lips of the coquette quivered as they received it, and then suddenly sobbed, and did not know why —

Do you?

“I have never kissed no one but mother,” said Seffy, who felt heinous, “I don't know how! I don't know what made me do it — I couldn't help it. It won't happen again ——”

Whereat Sally laughed and clung about Seffy's delighted neck and cried to his puzzled heart:

"Yes, it will!"

And kissed him back!

"Sally," said Seffy with solemnity, "do you mean it? You not mad?"

"Seffy," said Sally, "I am not worth it. I have been kissed by everybody who wanted to kiss me — and I have kissed everybody I wanted to kiss!"

"I am sorry for you, Sally," said Seffy, not meaning at all what she thought he meant — nor anything quite clear to himself, except that she had recklessly squandered something precious.

"I am, too, now."

And then —

"I shall never kiss no one but you, no more."

"Nor I anybody but you, Seffy."

And, strange as it may seem, in that moment, Seffy was the greater, braver and



stronger, and Sally but the waiting, willing woman — as she ought to have been. Indeed Seffy was courageous enough to have put that question which might, perhaps, transmute the pasture-field into one of those that lie within the borders of Elysium.

But Sam moved — with decision. They flew apart. Though he did not at once enter it was too late — the rapport was broken. Nevertheless, such things can be mended, if there is time. It is quite certain that if they could have continued a little longer in that dark parlor, with only the small ray of the lamp from the hall to light it, everything the sleepless old man at home so ardently wished might have been accomplished and they might have taken down that line-fence the next day and then have lived happy ever after — quite in the way of the old-fashioned story-books. For Seffy was still brave to audacity, and Sally was yet at his mercy — and happy to be so.

And here, if we were not arrived at a climax,

I would venture to halt this history for a moment that we might discuss a bit those trifles in life which the ancients called Fate ; and for which, or the lack of which, life often goes awry !

But while Seffy's courage grew again, and Sally's hope, the door on the other side of the room opened and the odious Sam came through.

V

SEFFY'S SITTING-UP — AND DOWN AGAIN

However, there was another door, — and Sam arrived only to hear it close upon Seffy, whom Sally had just pushed through it.

“Seffy?” asked Sam casually.

“Yes!” answered Sally, quite unable to keep the joy out of her voice, “he’s just come, and gone out to the spring — for a — drink!” prevaricated Sally.

“He’ll drink something.”

By which Sam meant some kind of an animal, with his water.

“Nothing but water!” said Sally meaningly. Sam perceived instantly “how the land lay,” and made his cunning plans. Sam was not dull. He returned to the sitting-room with Sally — where Seffy presently fol-

lowed, I am sorry to say, like a conquering hero—at which Sam gloated.

Unfortunately for Seffy, rural etiquette, as everybody knows, gave Sam precedence. “First come — last go,” is the illogical rule. But you are to be informed that the late-comer is at liberty to “outsit” his rival, if he can — or to dislodge him, if he can — by strategy. But every rustic lover attempts this at the greatest of risks. To fail is equivalent to losing caste — not only with the lady in question, but also with the fickle world. For no girl of any spirit would look upon a swain who had ignominiously failed at such a crisis, unless he should rehabilitate himself — which means to accomplish the almost impossible.

Sam took all this into consideration as he watched Seffy, — reclining in the easy chair which Sally had injudiciously and invidiously placed for him,— grow drowsy.

“Sally,” said Sam at the right moment, “play something.”

“I don’t care to!” protested Sally. But then she turned prettily to Seffy:

“Shall I, Seffy?”

“Yes,” smiled Seffy, from his Elysium, secure and confident. “I don’t care!”

“And,” said Sam insidiously, “we’ll all sing. You air, me tenor, Seffy bass.”

“I can’t sing no bass!” said Seffy easily, “and Sam knows it. He can’t make no fool off of me. Go on, I’ll set here and — and — enjoy myself.”

This was the direct rustic challenge, with aplomb! Sam might choose his weapons! It made no odds! And Sally had to take it up for Seffy. This she loyally did.

Unfortunately, when Sally went to the organ Seffy was at her back and in the shadow — the lamp had to be moved — and in that sleepy-hollow chair. But she had all possible confidence in him — and, alas! he had in himself. For a while he feasted his eyes upon the exquisite back she had turned to him — and then, with a thrill of possession, inven-

toried the hair he had kissed — a little disordered — the lips — the waist he had embraced — how glorious that was! It seemed almost impossible now that he had done it. And the hands — what? He was lost for a moment. Then he was plowing opposite his father. The voice which had said so sweetly — what was it exactly it had said?— what?— he was nearing the line stake — still plowing — he could hear the voice quite distinctly — many of them — a choir — “I want to be an angel.” Sally seemed mistily there — but he was still plowing — now he stopped — more and more mist — Seffy slept.

Sam stopped his tenor that Sally might hear him sleep.

“He said he couldn’t sing bass!” grinned Sam.

Sally’s hand flew to her heart. She had been trilling, if not with the art, yet with the feeling, of a lark. It was simply the joy with which Seffy had filled her — only joy, vast and free. The red flamed in her cheeks

at what she saw. I shall not describe it. No lover was ever more abject — no lady was ever more furious! We see the comedy of it only. We would not have been hurt, eh? But we did not live then nor there nor under Sally's curious small conditions — nor with Sally's temper. Curiously enough, this Scripture came to Sally's mind:

Could ye not watch with me one hour?

You know what strange and inopportune things come into the distressed, unguarded mind.

Sally rose with a dignity which even Sam had not suspected, and said:

“Gentlemen, good night.”

VI

THE CLOTHES-PIN CURE

The old man had plowed six times around the six-acre field the next morning, singing and whistling his unearthly tune as he went, when Seffy unlimbered at the bars and started the big bay around in the opposite direction. The first time they passed his father only winked mysteriously and continued to whistle. The next time he stopped.

“We won’t go home tell morning, hah, Sef? I usen’t to myself. Say — looks like somesing occurred after all, hah? No one don’t stay tell morning unless ——”

Seffy was silent.

“That’s right. Kiss but nefer tell. For telling breaks the spell. If you’ve had one and want another — kiss but shut your head

up. Say — you don't want to be no anchel now, I expect, hah? Mebby you *own* one? ”

But Seffy and the mare had disappointingly passed on.

“ Well! Gee — wo — way — gee! Git along! ” And he also made another furrow — in a less happy temper.

When they met again:

“ Whoa! ” roared the old man, and the mare stopped — trembling in her tracks. He laughed. Betz still responded if Seffy did not.

“ Sef — Seffy, *did* anysing occur? ”

Seffy faltered guiltily a moment.

“ Yes, ” he said, then briefly, “ something always occurs. ”

“ Sef — Seffy, but about the pasture — ”

Seffy started the mare.

“ Whoa! ” roared the old man again, with the same result. But he did not laugh this time. He sat on the handles of his plow and regarded his son. He was vaguely disturbing.

“ Say — ” he began ominously, “ you didn’t git sot out? ”

“ Uhu,” answered Seffy.

“ What! Why, you durn — ”

But then he laughed.

“ Shiny hat no good? ”

Seffy said no.

“ Nor the diamond, nor the hair-grease, nor nossing? Oh — gosh-a’mighty! Gee — wo — way! ”

But before they met again, his gaiety had given way to an immense disappointment. The tragedy of the situation had prevailed with him, too. Seffy sullenly kicked a clod to pieces. His father looked off toward the coveted pasture and sighed. It *was* a superb piece of land. And it had never looked fairer. The sun was on its velvet green — the sun of the morning. A few thick-girthed, wholesome oak-trees punctuated it. A stream laughed through it. Goodly cows stood chewing in the water and swishing amiably at the flies. The fences were intact.

It would have been a delight to the eyes of any farmer on earth. The old man sat on the handles of his plow until it all got in his head once more.

“It’s a nice field, Sef — Seffy,” he sighed. “I nefer seen no such clofer. And she’s a nice gal. I nefer seen no such gal, bese nice. Oach! they belong together. Well, gee — wo — way! They belong to *us*!”

They always stopped for a word when they met. The next time the old man said, quite caressingly:

“Come yere, Sef!”

He patted one plow-handle, which Seffy took, while he took the other. He thoughtfully pulled the boy’s shirt into place.

“Sef,” he said, “tell me about it. I’m sorry I laughed! But I lofe that pasture and you lofe Sally. Let’s not be fools, but git ’em. I expect you feel a little bad. But mebbby you’ll feel better if you talk about it. That is the way wiss me, I know; when any-sing occurs I like to gabble about it — and

go and do it again — *better*.” He let his hand rest kindly on Seffy’s shoulder. To this his son responded.

“I fell asleep,” said Seffy, sniffing ominously.

“Of course,” said his father, with a comforting movement of his hand. “That’s right.”

Seffy was amazed — and comforted.

“I expect I snored —— ”

“Er — yas — you *do* snore, Sef. Eferybody does. It’s the Lord’s fault, I expect.”

“In a nice cheer —— ”

“Yas — you oughtn’t ‘a’ set in no nice cheer, Sef; somesing uneasy is better.”

“Didn’t wake up till daylight.”

“Where was you then, Sef? ”

“In the cheer — Sal — Sally’s cheer.”

The words stuck pitifully in his throat.

“Yas —— ” said the old man, looking away,

“I don’t blame you, Sef.”

“It was a pasteboard thing — like a tombstone — pinned on my bosom —— ”

“Vat!” cried his father — the “w” would become “v” in cases of sudden emotion.

“Pasteboard — tombstone!” Seffy’s head drooped in shame. “With things printed on it — ‘Sephenijah P. Baumgartner, Junior, Went to His Rest, June 10th, 1871, in the 20th year of his age. Gone Not, But Forgot — Read Backwards.’”

His father stifled a laugh. It was an old trick to him.

“What — what did you do then?” he asked in as matter-of-fact a voice as he could command.

“Sneaked home. It was daylight!”

“Gone not, but forgot — read backwards, hah?”

He couldn’t quite make it out. *That* was new. Seffy helped him.

“Forgot, but not gone.”

There was no restraint to his father’s laughter now. After it had subsided he asked:

“What did you do wiss the tombstone?”

“Left it there.”

“That’s bad, Seffy. He’ll put it up at the store an’ you ken nefer go there no more.”

Seffy’s look of horror was a reminder to his father that it would have been better not to say that. But Old Baumgartner had tremendous aplomb.

“Nefer mind — nefer mind. Mebby he won’t sink of that,” — though he knew the store-clerk would be certain to think of it.

Upon a sudden thought the old man leaped up.

“And where was Sam? Say! When you woke up?”

“I don’t know.”

“But — he wasn’t there — at Sally’s?”

“No,” said Seffy hopelessly.

His father clutched his shoulder and set him on his feet.

“Well — you dam’ little idjiot — aha — ha-ha — don’t you see that you *did* set him out — *say!* Why, you’re a winner, Seffy! I’m proud of you!”

Seffy started and looked a little less inert. His father laughed hugely.

“I knowed you’d do it! Aha — ha-ha! Nobody ken beat a Baumgartner courting a gal! What’s sleeping — if you stayed! Huh! You stayed tell daylight! Sef — I’m laughing! Why, I used to sleep when I set up wiss you’ mammy efery time another feller was there. I done it a-purpose! And she’d wake me up when the other feller was gone and it came time for me to go. Why — *say* — I stayed and slept all night — tell broad daylight and go home wiss the cows in the morning — many a time! Yassir! Chust like you, Sef! Sef, you’re all right. Goshens, but you had a narrow excape, though! Chust suppose you’d ’a’ woke up and forgot what you was up to — you do that, sometimes, Sef, when you’re dreamy — and gone home before you remembered that you was out-setting him! He’d ’a’ had you dead, Seffy, dead and buried in the family lot. But you got him, Seffy, ol’ boy — and Sally, too, begoshens! Shall

we get at the fence to-day?" Seffy did not respond. And his father knew better than most of us where suggestion should stop.

"All right. We bese busy to-day. Mebby we better let it be tell to-morrow."

Of course Old Baumgartner was well aware that his logic would not bear the least scrutiny. And he regarded Seffy anxiously as he raced through it. But dull happy Seffy saw no flaws in it. He agreed with his father that he had out-sat Sam. And, if it had not been too plainly accidental, he would have adopted the fancy that he had had a heroic purpose in it — so convincing was his father's logic to his little mind.

The old man rattled on. Seffy must not think much.

"And snoring! Hah! Nossing — nossing at all! I could gife you lessons in snoring. And you' mammy usc' to say that she liked it. It wasn't so lonely and she knowed I was on deck and alive. Snoring! Aha — ha-ha! What's that — if you are sure of the gal!"

Seffy ahemmed several times and looked less like a condemned malefactor — though still far from suborned.

“ That dam’ molasses-tapper — he’s got to be licked — and if I got to do it myself — though I ain’t much of a licker. The whole county’ll know about that — to — to — ” he turned away to smile — “ tombstone. I bet he’s got it hanging up in the store now! We got to let ’em know that you set him out, Sef! Yas — stayed tell daylight! Woke up and stayed! Sleeping was chust to ketch him! You was awake all the time! Lie a little, hah? ”

His father was proud of this last. As they drew apart he called back :

“ If she don’t like snoring, Sef, wear a clothes-pin when you set up wiss her — one of them wiss a spring — not? Aha — ha-ha! ” And then: “ You all right, Sef — yassir! you all right — you the conquering hero comes! Go right back — mebbly to-night — you entitled to do it.”

“Begoshens, I will!” said Seffy in his father’s own slogan.

Seffy would have pressed his suit even without this, I think — because of those moments in the dark parlor. One does not soon forget that sort of thing.

“Now,” advised his father, “you know well enough what kind of a temper goes with red hair — I use to have hair enough once — and it was red! All right when it’s on your side. But hell when it’s against you. Them red-heads always regrets — I do and she does! Say — Sef — Seffy, don’t you let her regret in vain — catch her while she’s at it.”

So, Seffy went up the hill again — not that night — which was a mistake — he could not quite bring himself to that — but the next. And he had washed the grease out of his hair and left the hat at home as well as the butterfly tie and the boots and, if I do say it, he was a very handsome fellow, worth at least a dozen of his rival.

But Sally, watching for this very thing,

saw him coming and hardened her heart, as Pharaoh did in the face of proffered felicity, and, by a good deal of forcible instruction, she succeeded in getting the little maid to say that she was not at home. The maid's untutored face showed Seffy that she was not telling the truth, however, and she was not sorry for it. She would never have treated Seffy so!

Seffy shifted his hat from one hand to the other and then said:

"Tell her — tell her — *when she comes home* — that I'm sorry —" He did not exactly know what he was sorry for, and so said good night and went.

"He knowed you *was* at home!" reproached the little maid. "He was sorry for *you*."

"What did he say?" demanded Sally savagely.

"To tell you that he was sorry — when you got home."

"When I got home? Then I better stay away, I expect. That's what he meant, did

he? Well, I'll show him!" But the maid understood Seffy's rustic chivalry and she did not laugh with her mistress.

Yet, Sally went back to her window and again watched, hoping Seffy would look back. She was not quite sure what she would do. Perhaps she would get angry — perhaps — But if he would only look! He did not, and Sally understood that he had accepted his *congé* as she had given it. And quite as the old man had said, she did regret, now, and she had regretted that other night. But there was more penance than he had said or thought. Yet — there was the Pressel temper! And it did not await the subsidence of the sorrow, but rose at once. What business had he tamely to accept the situation?

I am satisfied that there is some connection between red hair and temper. And I am, further, satisfied that there is even more between the associated ideas of red hair, temper and *regret*. But my difficulty is to determine just where each stands. Logically, the regret

ought to come last. But, to Sally, and in this case, it came in the middle. For, she began and she ended without it, but she distinctly remembered having had it. Therefore, it must have been in the middle.

And Sam administered Seffy's coup de grâce! Perhaps it was accidental. But I think it must have been nothing less than spying and then devilish invention — it was so entirely apropos.

As Seffy descended the Hill of Delight on which Sally's pretty little house stood, Sam ascended it, singing, as he passed Seffy:

“Napoleon, with a thousand men,
Marched up the hill and down again.”

From his own darkness, Seffy saw a golden shaft of light burst from the door at the top of the Hill of Delight, and, in it, he saw Sam mount to where was his heart's desire.

VII

THE POISON-SPRING IN THE COTTON WOODS

They met on the damp country road one evening — Sally and the old man — two weeks later. She was walking with drooping head, and, when she suddenly raised it, as he ahemmed, he was quite sure that she had been crying.

“I don’t know what’s the matter wiss him!” said Seffy’s father, as if they had been discussing Seffy.

“Who?” asked the girl tremulously — though she knew — “he ain’t sick?”

“Sef — Seffy — my Seffy. No — not exactly — not to say sick. I like him so — he’s all I got — and it’s somesing wrong wiss him. He can’t live long this way. Efery night he’s down by the Poison-Spring — wiss

the witches — often all night. He's there now. I chust kem away — trying to cheer him up a little. Well, so good night."

He passed on, for he was a merciful old man, and Sally hurried away to the Poison-Spring. And Old Baumgartner laughed through his gnarled hands behind the cover of the next turn in the road, though even to him laughter was no more gay, as of yore.

Seffy was there, on his back, with his hands under his head, staring up at the moon. He looked pitifully alone. A great lump surged in Sally's throat, and if she had obeyed only her heart she would have flung her arms around him. But another of those qualities which go with red hair, pride, prevented this. She coughed a little and Seffy flew around.

"I — was just taking a walk," she said.

"Yes," said Seffy humbly.

"The Poison-Spring is — on my property —"

"I'll go away!" said Seffy, rising. He

looked gaunt as he stood on his feet in the moonlight.

“Seffy — I didn’t mean —” began the really unhappy girl, her head quite giving way to her heart now.

“I got nowheres else to go now,” excused Seffy. “I can’t go to the store — Sam’s got the tombstone there — or anywhere where there’s people — account everybody knows. Sam’s got a notice of it hung up in the store. It’s all they talk about. He got it printed in the paper, too! I’d go away, out West, but pappy don’t want me to go. I come here, account no one else ever comes — it’s unhealthy. I didn’t know that you owned ——” He was shambling off. The last words came from a distance. “Good night.”

He did not know that Sally was following him. When she spoke it was close behind him. He veered so suddenly as to catch the pain on her face. But he was dull, Seffy.

“Seffy,” she said, close upon him, “Seffy, I *was* at home.”



Seffy said nothing.

“Seffy — I am unhappy — and a fool!”

Still Seffy did not move nor speak.

“Don’t you care that I am unhappy?”

Still silence.

“And don’t you never forgive no one?”

At the end was a sob.

Ah! Seffy could not harbor ill against a dog that had bit him. And Sally sobbed. The hands he had kissed before, he kissed again — in that fashion, you will remember, which must have survived from some cavalier ancestor.

“Seffy,” she said a little later, “you know I got an awful temper?”

“Pappy says so,” sighed Seffy.

“He’s right, and you *know*! But, Seffy — you can help me to cure it — will you?”

Joy leaped back into her life and it was very sweet. And would he? He left her no doubt — not the least. She hovered about him bewitchingly. What the peering moon saw — I shall not tell. And when the watch-

ful old man saw them coming out of the Cotton Woods together he went singing home and slept.

Oh, it was not entirely the pasture-field now. He did not forget that. But Seffy, whom he adored — perhaps for the very gentleness and sweetness which constantly vanquished his happiness — Seffy was going away from happiness which sought him — and, for this farmer, and this time and place, where was little joy and much labor, it seemed wanton — it was wanton! Do you think it was a slight thing that kept Sephenjah P. Baumgartner, Senior, awake for five nights? For, let me tell you here, all this had become serious business to the old man — if we do treat it lightly. For he loved his son — adored Sally — and valued the pasture-field. Therefore, in striving to bring them all into his keeping together, he was dealing with the things (little things to you) he loved most on earth. You, of course, have greater things. But you must, now and then, try to

feel the imperiousness of small things in small lives.

I shall tell you of their conversation as they came from the Poison-Spring, the radiance of the moon in Seffy's wan face, the very joy of the starry heavens in that of the girl — I must tell you what their talk was of. And I beg you again to remember that these small things, which you despise, were all they had there and then. I have wondered whether the wanton sacrifice of a child's toy when he is three is not as dreadful as the sacrifice of his love when he is twenty. Do you know?

"Seffy," said Sally, with his hand held so close under her beating heart that it registered each avid pulsation, "I am most to blame and you have forgiven me. But you are to blame, too, and I hope you won't forgive yourself too soon."

"For why?" queried the dull Seffy, with attention only for that wildly beating thing — for, alas, that was his bane as hers was

something else — forgetting future perils in present happiness.

“Then you’ll fix it before you do!”

“Fix what?” asked the astonished Seffy.

“You let yourself be fooled. And that raises my temper more than anything else. I don’t want no beau that every one laughs at. You got to have more backbone. When I am mean to you — I can’t help it when my temper’s up — and it’s hard to get it down, mighty hard, when it’s up — when I am mean to you — curse me!”

Seffy stared aghast. He would as soon have heaped maledictions upon the head of an archangel!

“Or hit me!”

Another stare — another conviction of the utter impossibility of such a thing!

“Yes! With a club! A flat-iron! A potato-masher! A poker!”

Seffy could laugh now. She was becoming absurd. Had he only known that she — poor futile woman! — was trying to secure

in advance their happiness in the turmoil which she knew would come!

“Yes! That is the way for such as me! The only way! And I’m used to it!”

Now Seffy was shocked!

“My father — or mother — or granny — or,” — she hesitated — “Sam — have, at one time or another, used all these things on me. I need the snaffle! You need the whip!”

And she laughed a little herself and that was Seffy’s excuse for joining her.

“You have no temper and I have a thousand times too much. You can see how that will work. And, Seffy, you got a bad reputation about here now, and I wouldn’t like you to have it always. So you must brace up and do things to make the people like you again. I want you to be able to face any one at the store — and do it in front of Sam.”

The dull Seffy answered:

“But what can I do?”

The whole case seemed quite hopeless.

“I don’t know. But there is something.

Ask your pappy. Whatever it is, I will help you. You know it makes me foolish, too. And I hate that more than anything — being laughed at. If I was you, I'd lick Sam. But I know you won't. I expect he's too big for you. But there are other things."

And Seffy left her at her door that night, determined to do some great thing to set himself properly before the little community once more. Because — once more — she had let him kiss her.

He and his father held a star-chamber session that night yet — Seffy waking him up for it.

"Take her home from church, begoshens!" adjudged his father.

Now this seems small advice upon a small matter. But it was very great advice upon a very great matter, as you will see.

VIII

THE WHITE SIGNAL WHICH MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN BLACK

No suitor in German-Pennsylvania, though it be in Maryland, has entirely established his right to the maiden of his choice, either before the public or in her sight or his own, until he has escorted her off-hand from church on a Sunday night. And this he must accomplish at the church door, out of — sometimes — a savage rivalry challenging disaster.

For by this simple, primitive, heroic process the status of contestants for a maid's favor is fixed. He whose arm is taken can face his little world on Monday. He whose arm is rejected is, on Monday, a social exile. For the small world

of the vicinage is always there and this is the maiden's public election of him she chooses to honor, and her public rebuke to his too presumptuous rival. And, after that, she is a poor thing indeed who will be seen in public with the latter. For nothing is more sweet and cruel than love.

Seffy was not a publicly-acknowledged suitor. He could not be. It was impossible! There was that tombstone still up in the store. Sam had not yet been dislodged. And Seffy had not yet arrived where he might put the awful question — there was a recognized period for this, and events had put it further and further off! Indeed, he shuddered when he thought of it — even then, after that understanding with Sally! — and contemplated getting his father to do it for him.

It had become known, in the wireless way such things spread in the country, that there had been a tentative making-up between Seffy and Sally. But Seffy was still not received in public. Nor did he appear with Sally!

Nor might he call upon her! There must be some open defiance and victory which all could see and understand before these things might happen. The right hand of renewed fellowship would not be extended to Seffy until he had met and vanquished his rival in public. It was the primitive right of the strongest, proved physically here as in the Roman circus. Seffy had never shown himself a master of material prowess. He demurred a bit at such a plunge into the arena. But there was no other way.

“Why, Sef,” advised his father, “after that it’s a dead open and shut game. You better do the biggest sing you ken — and that’s the end of it. If I had Sally on my side, I wouldn’t keer who the hell was on the other! You take her home from church! Yas, right afore their dam’ noses! Then they’ll run after you and send you presents. It ain’t no guess-work for you! You know that Sally will be waiting for you wiss her arm all ready to take yourn. Gosh! I

nefer had no such sure sing. I had to take my chances wiss you' mammy! And it was three other fellers wiss their arms out — and the right side yet! But your daddy was close up against the church door. And when she come out he didn't waste no time a-saying polite, 'Miss Hengler, ken I haf the pleasure to see you home this evening?' I'd 'a' lost the game if I had waited to git off all that dictionary stuff! Yassir! For right opposite me was Bill Eisenkrout — Sam's uncle — and I knowed his arm'd shoot out like a patent corn-husker the minute you' mammy come.

"He was mighty quick, but mighty polite! I knowed he'd say that foolishness about being pleased to see her home. Well, she come out and I chust grabbed. And while I was marching on like a conquering hero, informing her that it was a nice efening, I could hear Bill on the off side, gitting out that stuff 'bout pleasure and seeing her home. Nancy says, says she: 'Sank you, Mr. Eisenkrout, I'm suited;' and I laughed like hell! And, 'begoshens,

Nancy laughed too! And that settled Bill for efer more! Oh, it's nossing like a laugh at the right time to kill a man off! Bill left town the next day. He had to. And he didn't show up tell the next fall! Sef, you got a sure sing. And, begoshens, you might just as well finish Sam up in the same job — put him out of town. Next Sunday you watch Sam. Keep right opposite him. Then git your arm in action about a second sooner. Left side, you know, her right! Sally 'll be on the lookout. Don't stop to say any fool sings about the pleasure of seeing her home. Do it. And, when Sam gits his work in, laugh! Laugh like a bull! And git Sally to laugh. I bet you two dollars and ten cents that Sam won't be in town the next day!"

Like a campaign speech was the effect of this!

Seffy objected no longer. He said he would do it all! Perhaps this, too, got about. At all events, before the next Sunday,

the interest created by their rivalry was more than equal to the voice of the Gospel. All the township would be at church!

Sam would not be dislodged. He invented the most diabolical schemes for sequestrating Sally to himself during the week which followed — into which guileless Sally often fell — and which seemed to proclaim her suitor to be himself. Sam, you will remember, had access to Sally, but Seffy had not. Seffy confessed that this looked sinister. True, he remembered all that had passed between them. But once before he had been in error.

So that Seffy, before the week's end, began once more — and more strongly — to deprecate the necessity for this public demonstration of his status. His father demanded it as a diplomatic necessity, inasmuch as Sally still retained Sam on a basis so much like his own as to make the situation extremely embarrassing to even Old Baumgartner, who had let it be known that he was the active coadjutor of his son. To vanquish Seffy was to van-

quish him, and he, if not Seffy himself, screwed Seffy's courage to the sticking point. After this, Seffy weakened no more, but proclaimed his purpose. It was generally conceded that the one who failed now would have to leave town.

So here was retiring little Seffy forced by circumstances into a public rivalry which he detested, and, it may as well be confessed — feared. It must, also, be explained that Sally's course in maintaining these two strings to her bow until the breaking moment was not only universally commended, but was the unswerving custom of the vicinage for girls so fortunate as to have two strings. It was held likely to force one or the other to the point, — and this was the purpose of rustic coquetry! And Sally's coquetry was not only acknowledged; it was tolerated, and, I fear, encouraged. And, alas, it had been as sweet to her as vinous dissipation to men. But now it had made not only her own, but Seffy's, position tremendously more difficult.

IX

IT WAS SEFFY WHO WAS "SACKED"

So they three went to church on a certain Sunday. Sally sat on the "women's side" and Seffy and Sam on the "men's side" in full view of the "audience"—which perceived and understood and was ready at the proper time to applaud, from the preacher to the sexton—to raise or lower its thumbs upon the combatants.

When the benediction had been said Seffy hastened out and found himself a place—close to the door, according to his father's word—in one of the lines of young men which stretched on either side of the path from the church door to the road beyond, at least a quarter of a mile. But he did not see Sam. Some one pushed in front of him.

And, instead of combating for his position, he yielded it and found one further down, still seeking the location of his rival. He was crowded from this one, too, and he let it go and sought another one because he had not seen Sam. And it was necessary to his father's scheme, he remembered, that Sam and he should be about opposite. Of course, all this was error. His place was right by the church door. That was where Sally had a right to expect to find him. It had become a public matter, too. The public had its rights. It expected him there, even if he had to shed the blood of noses to stay there. This had often happened. But he was bewildered in the contradictory courses advised by his father, and, finally, seeking that which seemed best, found that which was worst. Dull Seffy!

He at last discovered Sam and found a lodgment for himself opposite and away down near the gate, where only the married men were — such as still waited for their wives —

who amiably smoked until they came along. No unmarried maiden ever expects to be matched there. And, had Seffy been as wise as he was not, he would not have halted there. But he was deluded by Sam. There he was in the opposite line, the wrong one, indifferently chatting, and even smoking, with Hilary Groff — a married man. Seffy was now so sure of his conquest, that Sam's indifference vexed him. Evidently he did not mean to contend with him for Sally's arm, and it was to be a cheap and bloodless victory. For Seffy was one of those who grow brave as opposition diminishes.

And now they were slowly coming down — the maidens running the gantlet of love. One — two — three — four — five — a dozen happy matings were made. Seffy was counting. One poor chap was "sacked." He crushed his hat over his eyes and charged back through the lines and across the fields — no matter where. And then came Sally! — in a trim little hat with a fluttering ribbon that

looked for all the world like the white signal, bearing straight down upon him! But there was something in her eyes — expectant — militant — that made them starry! On she came, with her head in the air — looking neither to the right nor to the left, as if she expected to walk home alone, nearly three miles!

“ Oh, no!” thought Seffy — and Sam.

But a bit of terror smote her face pale when she had passed the door — alone — and showed more and more as she went on. Some one laughed — then there was an unmistakable titter along the line. Still Sally passed on, keeping her temper as never before. Was not the old man right about the effect of laughter?

But now the temper loosed itself slowly,— her face was scarlet. She had nearly reached the married men. Some one whispered:

“ Gosh! He’s gitting even by sacking *her!* ”

This was repeated. There was more laugh-

ter and more tittering. The crowd deserted the lines nearest the church and followed Sally down on either side in huge tumultuous phalanxes to see what would happen,—if it were possible that she would have to go home alone. Several young men who had never dared to approach her began to think of it. They knew that rather than not be taken at all she would take any one of them! There was more tumult now than laughter. And Sally's face grew so white that her eyes blazed like stars in the midst of it.

Seffy quailed. He recognized the temper — only he had never seen it as terrible as this. He had forgotten Sam. It was only Sally he saw, as one sees with fear-stalled nerves the locomotive as it leaps upon him.

And the onlookers, crowding at the sides, thought it a great and terrible hand to hand battle — to wait that way till the last moment and then to spring like tigers — or a piece of tremendous foolishness.

“Both of you must be absolute sure,” said



Hilary Groff to Sam, "or absolute fools! Ain't you got no pity on the girl?"

"Shut up!" answered Sam, "and watch. I'm calculating on him leaving town to-morrow. That is my game. And I'm playing for the pot."

You see that Sam had not forgotten Seffy for a moment, even if Seffy had forgotten him. He stepped noiselessly three paces toward Sally, crossed in front of Seffy and took her arm. There was a laugh almost ribald. Seffy could not see clearly — he could, least of all, think clearly — he did not know what had happened. He saw only the little white signal before him and blindly put out his arm.

It did not reach Sally at all, but Sam, who turned and said with an imitation of girlish politeness:

"Thank you, Mr. Baumgartner, I'm suited."

And, Sally, her face flaming with vengeance, took the trouble to turn back and cry

— not into his ear, but into his very heart :

“ Thank you, I’m suited.”

There are some people to whom no punishment seems sufficient, while any remains to be administered. One of the onlookers was of such a sort. He cried out as poor Seffy slunk away :

“ Give her back her dollar !”

And another :

“ Or ninety-nine cents, anyhow !”

Seffy quailed and drew back from the line — it was the instant that makes or mars — and he had lost. He might still have knocked Sam down and won — this would have been perfectly proper — but he followed the man who had but a moment before crushed through the line, and wild jeers followed him.

X

THE HUGE FIST OF THE FARMER

From that day Seffy avoided all public places — and all men. He was nobody — nothing. He fell rapidly into that kind of disrepute which is common to persons with failing reputations. It was to his discredit that he did not leave town, but this his father prevented. Again he took to the Cotton Woods and the Poison-Spring, with, perhaps, the dim hope that Sally might again find him there, and that the peeping moon might again interfere on his behalf.

But the moon went through all her phases and then slowly turned her back on him — and Sally never came. In their casual meetings she was ice. Once they passed on the road to the store. She was in precisely the

dear garments he remembered so well — of that first day — and as gay as then. He trembled, and then looked up like a mortally-wounded animal. She was looking calmly over his head. To the rest of the world she was gayer than ever, though that Sunday-night laugh still echoed in her head — kept her maddened. After all, it wasn't worth while to care for even Seffy with such a little spirit. Why didn't he fight — kill Sam or somebody? And the cunning Sam set the story more widely going that for revenge Seffy had deserted her at the church door and that he had first laughed — Seffy. This was too piquant to be passed over, and it was heard far and wide.

To Seffy's father, who, even in this dire strait, strove for happiness for them both — and, of course, the pasture-field — she said with more abandoned disrespect than she had ever addressed to any one:

“You ought to be glad that I do not take revenge on him! If he wasn't so little I



11-57

would. But he's not worth bothering about. Sacked *me*, did he? I'll show him!"

"Why, Sally! What would you do?"

"Put him over my knee and spank him and then pen him in the cellar!"

"Sally, don't talk like that," pleaded the old man. "It sp'iles your voice."

And Sally gave him then and there a rude specimen of how her voice was being spoiled — which I may not reproduce. But it was expressed in anathema. Indeed, others had noticed that her voice, somehow, had lost its soft richness. She was particularly kind to the young store-keeper now, and he was particularly reckless and drunken. And rumor presently had it that she was known to be drunk with him sometimes!

"Sally —" said Seffy timorously, one day, (he had waited to tell her this) "you don't think — you don't believe — that I — said —"

"I know," said Sally in voice that froze him, "that you are a fool — and I am not

fond of fools. Go away! Be glad I don't lick you!"

And then rumor had it that she and Sam were to be married — "for spite."

But, curiously enough, the person most affected by all this was not Sally, nor Seffy, nor Sam. It was Seffy's father, whose sufferings were nearing agony. Nothing could be done with Seffy. And the course of the love between them, which had never been ruffled since Seffy was born, was often ruffled now. The old man, as their relations grew strained, became more and more exasperated at Seffy's lack of initiative.

"Gosh-a'mighty! You goin' to let that molasses-tapper set right down on you and *nefer* git off? Can't you see that she wants *you*? It don't matter what she says! Don't you know it's a dare? Air you going to take a dare? Why, you usen't to when you was a baby! When you year that durned new laugh of Sally's can't you see that somesing's wrong? She's drinking! That's what! You

think she'd laugh so and drink if she wass happy? You was a fool — yas, a durn fool. It's your fault. Go right up to her like a man and say so."

"I did," said Seffy.

"Hah, you did? An' what she says?"

"She said she knowed it!"

"Well — begoshens! She's a worse fool. Gather her in and make a fool off of her and git efen! Turning her back on an ol' man that harms no one — and her guardeen yit!"

Alas, this was another thing he had done to secure the pasture-field — made himself her legal guardian!

"I'll gife it up — the guardeen. Yassir. She ken take keer herself. Fool — of course. Bose fools! You wait tell she marries that durn molasses-tapper if you want to see fun!"

There was such real agony in the old man's voice that Seffy suffered, too.

"Pappy, I'm sorry — I ain't no good, I expect. I guess I'll go away before the wedding."

"Wedding — wedding! You goin' to let that wedding go on? And him git the pasture-field? Put him between us and the railroad!"

"How can *I* stop it, pappy?"

"By marrying her yourself!"

"I got enough, pappy," said Seffy hopelessly. "They'd lynch me if I tried it again. I guess I'd better go away."

Quick anger flamed in his father's face at this invertebrate submission. And his voice, when he spoke, was harsher than Seffy had ever heard it.

"Got enough — got enough — that's all you know! And go away! That's all you ken say, you bull-headed idjiot! Go and apologize and git her back. Don't run. Then marry her next day. That'll settle the molasses-tapper, I expect, and show that you got an inch or two of backbone! Choke her — chloroform her and carry her off!"

Seffy laughed at the absurdity of the thing. But it was unmirthful.

“Gosh-a’mighty! On a time like this you ken laugh! You right, you ain’t no good — no, begoshens! You air an idjiot and fool! You no man! No, nor nefer will be! I’m sorry I’m you’ daddy. I am, begoshens!”

Then, as his wrath mounted, he raised his huge fist and threatened Seffy.

“Git away from me, or I’ll break your head! I can’t stand you no more! You not worth a dam’ — not a dam’ — to nobody. You look like you’ mammy’s relatifes — and they was all no good — git away, I tell you!”

He roared ominously; for Seffy, amazed at this from his gentle old father, was looking straight up at him out of a child’s round eyes, his lips parted, his throat exposed. Slowly, as his parent heaped contumely upon him, his sensitive young face whitened, and the light left it. Only, when his father mentioned his mother’s name, he said with infinite softness:

“Why, pappy!”

But he stood without fear under the great fist — as he had often done.

“You hear! I told you to git away or I’ll smash your face in! I don’t want you no more. Go to your mammy’s relatifes out West”—he laughed horridly—“and see what they’ll do for you! You’ll live on bread and water—they ain’t got nossing else! You’ll work all day and all night—and you’ll haf no fun—they don’t know no better—go!”

“Yes,” said Seffy, turning dumbly away.

There was no doubt that he meant to go now. His dumb acquiescence in his sentence raised his father’s wrath to fury.

“Yas—go, and be mighty quick about it. I’m chust itching to smash you. I’ll nefer send for you if you rot in the poorhouse. I’ll nefer mention you’ name as long as I lif—no! I disown you! Never let me see you’ dam’ face again—go!”

It was all so utterly unbelievable that Seffy turned back. This raving madman his jolly old father, who had revered the memory of his mother and had taught him to do so—

to mention her every time he prayed? The old man had turned, but Seffy came close and touched him gently. The caress only maddened him. Seffy cowered at the passion on the face of his father. He raised his fist.

“Git out — dam’ you!” he shouted. “If you don’t —” But the boy could not, now.

The huge fist trembled on high a moment, some instinct of sanity struggling to control it — then it fell on Seffy’s upturned face.

He dropped among the clods — his pale hair mingling with the dust — his hands inertly outlying — terror still quivering in his lips and nostrils. Blood slowly oozed from his mouth and nose, and a livid red mark began to grow upon the depression in his forehead which the blow had made.

One moment — two — the old man looked down at this. Then he understood that he had done it and with a savage animal-cry he swept the boy into his arms. Seffy doubled inertly upon him, as the dead do. His father raced frenziedly home with him, leap-

ing fences like a hound. He put him upon the pretty white bed the boy had been wont to make with such care for himself. It was dainty and smooth now. The blood dripped from Seffy's face and from his own beard and stained the white coverings. The sight was full of horror! He staggered drunkenly away. He looked hastily for his gun — meaning, perhaps, to kill himself. But then it seemed to him that Seffy sighed. He fell on his knees and agonized for the life he thought he had taken. Then he felt a pulse-beat. With a hoarse cry he rushed out into the road, calling for the doctor. Two people were coming toward him. It was Sam and Sally, returning from their marriage.

By what he saw on Old Baumgartner's face and hands, Sam was sobered. Both understood that they were approaching some tragedy.

"Who?" asked Sally, suddenly oblivious of Sam.

"Seffy."

“ Sam ! ” she turned upon her husband with command. “ Bring the doctor ! ”

Sam went with satisfactory haste.

“ Who hurt him ? ” asked Sally, as if she were ready to slay him who did.

“ I. I killed him because he wouldn’t marry you ! You wouldn’t marry him ! Oh, you devil ! ”

It was at that instant that the great change in Sally came. She leaped before him into the house and up to Seffy’s room. When the old man slowly followed she was there — with eyes bent upon Seffy’s bloody, unconscious face. So she kept her eyes. She did not speak. And when the doctor came, she was still there — as at first — unconscious as he, the doctor said.

He was not dead, and presently he breathed again. But his eyes remained closed, and, late that night, when he had drifted from unconsciousness into deep sleep, they put out the light and left him.

When they came again he had disappeared.

XI

WHEN SPRING CAME

That was a cold and lonely winter for the old man. The bay mare stood in the stable and whinnied for Seffy. The old house was full of harsh echoes. Its spirit seemed to have gone. Seffy's father knew now what a rare thing is joy — and what a joyous creature Seffy had been.

The ground was hard to till. And often he thought about what he had said of Seffy's mother.

Then he would toil up the steep stair to the garret — he had become quite feeble — and take out of an old German chest a daguerreotype of her with Seffy in her arms. And sometimes he would cry over it until his beard was wet.

“God bless you, my little boy,” he would sometimes say, “that you cared for her more than I did. You nefer called her no names.

“I didn’t know I could be so mean to the dead — who don’t deserfe it, and can’t talk back. And, God-a’mighty! If any one’s to be called names, it’s me! — not her nor — you, Seffy, nor you! For I expect I’m a murderer!”

And sometimes, when his loneliness was too hard to be borne, he would go out and sit for hours and talk to the old bay mare — about Seffy. He fancied she quite understood, and I do, too.

When the spring came he plowed alone. And this was hardest of all. To plow around and around his vast fields with no one to meet in the other furrow — no one to talk, to smile, to laugh to — then, when noon came, to sit under the shade of some tree redolent with memories of the pretty little boy, where he and Seffy had sat, from his childhood to his manhood, and eat the food which choked!

Oh, if he could only have laughed — at himself, at Seffy, at the mare, at anybody or anything! If he could only have laughed!

And he knew that every animal on the place wondered and hungered for little Seffy and questioned him with pathetic eyes, while he, at first, guiltily kept silent — then tried to confess his shame to them.

“Yas,” he told the mare, “I done it — I struck him — here, right here! In the face — while his eyes was looking in mine — pleading — and here was blood — and here and here — and dust in his hair — and his eyes was closed — and when I run home wiss him his legs dangled like he was dead. And he crawled away somewheres to die — I don’t know why they don’t come and hang me. I haf told ’em all that I killed him. But no one don’t arrest me.”

XII

THE KISS LIKE SEFFY'S

One day he went up to the vine-covered house on the Hill of Delight, with a bundle of papers in his hand.

“See yere, Sally,” he said senilely, “yere’s you’ papers. I gif up the guardeenship. You ken git another one if you not on age yit. I don’t keer a durn who. I’m tired. If it wasn’t for you — Seffy would be alive.”

Sally drooped her head.

“Yes,” she said, so humbly that he relented a little.

“I got to do it. I ain’t no account no more. I ought to haf a guardeen myself. And people’s making such a fuss — you ain’t treated us right — no, you ain’t! I guess I had better not be mixed in. They say that

you married a drunkard, and killed — a man — and got to be a drunkard yourself. But I know better 'bout one sing. I killed him. Yit they say that you married Sam chust to spite poor Seffy — and yet lofing Sef. Oh, Sef — Sef — why didn't she tell you so!"

He went on heedlessly till he knew that Sally was sobbing. He raised her face and looked into it curiously and saw for the first time that pathetic wanness of which, also, people began to talk.

"Sally," he said then, "you not well?"

"Quite well," said Sally.

"Then you got trouble — trouble, too, Sally?"

"Oh, pappy," she pleaded breathlessly, "don't you turn away from me, too. I have no one but you! No. I have not treated you right. But, oh, life is so hard to me!"

"No," he said, smoothing her hair with his gnarled old hand. "I'fe had my eyes turned within. But I didn't know you had trouble. I heerd that Sam had took to hard drinkin'

and I sought you didn't keer. You was so reckless —"

"Yes," she sighed, "I am reckless! And — yes — I drink sometimes. But it is that way I can forget."

"I don't turn ag'in' no one in trouble, efen if they don't treat me right — and drink —"

"Forgive me! Oh, forgive me, pappy! The suffering is mine!"

"Yas," he said, "yas — don't cry. But the suffering ain't all yourn."

"No," she said. "Not all — not all!"

"But, Sally, if I take the papers back, you won't drink no more? It ain't nice — efen if you air the wife of a drunkard."

"No. If you will be my friend, I will try to be what I would have been as Seffy's wife!"

"It's a bargain — and I'm sorry I spoke so harsh, Sally. Mebby, mebby — God knows! — we ken comfort one another. I — Sally — I need some one, too!"

"Yes! Will you let me? I will have no friend but you!"

“Yas! And I won’t have no friend but you, Sally.”

“Will you let me kiss you?”

“Do you want to?” he cried tremulously.

“Yes,” whispered the girl.

“Me? Sally, lem me kiss *you!*”

She put up her lips almost solemnly — and with that their compact was sealed.

XIII

ONE BLOW FOR THAT TO SEFFY

He took the papers home again, and was very gentle with her afterward, for the things which the world blamed in her. His was the only real kindness she knew. Her little canting world had no pity for her. But to her drunken husband, in spite of all, she was a loyal wife, and the old man liked her the better for it.

So it came to pass that they two, the bent old man and the girlish wife of the drunkard, separated more and more from the world and came more and more together. And often they were seen in the fields together and walking along the roads arm in arm.

With Sally's little fortune at command, Sam had gone rapidly to the bad. And Sally

came to know what tears were, and that dreadful kind of waiting which falls to the lot of such women,—the waiting for the fall of a footstep which makes one shudder yet rejoice.

They told her to get rid of him, but she shook her head and thought of the inscription in her wedding ring.

After a while it was the gentle old man who helped to make these vigils less intolerable — going away stealthily by the back door when Sam's unsteady step was heard at the front — an angel of light if ever there was one in plowman's jacket.

It fell grimly to his lot, too, to provide for Sam by diminishing the little farm he had longed and hoped for, acre by acre. There was no contention between them as to this. The young wife's wishes were his law.

“He married me for that,” said Sally, the first time, “and I let him marry me for that — just for spite. Only no one was spited but me — but me — well, he shall have it — all — all ”— her voice broke a little — “all but

the — pasture-field — that — no one shall have but — you — or Seffy when I die.”

Only once he interfered. Sam raised his hand to strike her and he laid the drunkard at his feet with a blow such as he had struck but once before in his life.

“I am her guardeen!” he cried as he struck. “By the Lord, I’m her guardeen!”

For a moment he gloated over the prostrate brute. Then he stood up trembling before Sally.

“Forgif me,” he begged. “But I couldn’t help it. It done itself. Mebby — God-a’mighty only knows! — it was a chance to efen up for the other one. And yit it was a righteous blow—yas, it was a *righteous blow!*”

Sally put her hands into his and sobbed.

“Yes,” she said. “You are the first that ever saw —”

It was too late to stop. And before it was done he knew that this was not a new experience to her, and that she suffered it — and was almost glad of it — for penance.

“By the Lord,” cried the old man, “if he efer strikes you ag’in I’ll kill him!”

“No,” said Sally softly.

“Yas!” he insisted with some of his old violence.

“No,” she repeated sadly. “Because it is all my fault — all the shame — the shame — because I — deserve it! And — *Thou shalt not kill!* You know *we* have tempers! And we have both used them!”

He shuddered and thought of the plowed field, with Seffy lying there.

“Good night!” he said with averted face.

“I didn’t mean that, pappy — I didn’t mean that you killed him. He’s *not* dead. Pappy, kiss me — good night! And forgive me.”

But this also made her dearer to him. And so, little by little, they drew closer and closer, until a certain happiness was his and a certain content hers. Occasionally they laughed. But this was not often. They were well satisfied to sit before the winter fire, she with an



elbow on his knee, he with his rugged hands in her hair. And after a while she would ask him no more to kiss her good night — he did it as of right, and very beautifully, on her hair — so much like Seffy, that first dear kiss — that it made her sob — always.

“Just like Seffy!” she said the first time and cried, pushing him out of the door when he would have asked a question.

But he asked his question one day. It was whether she had loved Seffy.

“Not till Seffy comes!” she cried. “I won’t answer.”

“Sally,” he said solemnly, “I killed my little boy. He is dead. I hurt him — I made him afeared of me — he dragged himself away to die, like wild animals that air hurt by men. So you will have to tell me.”

“No — no!” she begged. “He is not dead. And some day he will come back to us — you —”

“Sally, you said ‘us’?”

“Yes. Forgive me. I meant — *you*.”

“ Did you mean me? ”

“ Yes — oh, yes! ”

“ Cross your breast! ”

She made this adjuration with a smile.

But when he had gone, she groveled on the floor and cried:

“ Us — us — us! ”

XIV

FOR SEFFY'S SAKE

And so three — nearly four — years passed and Sam was dead.

“Pappy,” she said afterward, “you have been very good to me!”

“And you to me — it's efen — say nossing more.”

“You have kept me from going crazy, I think.”

“You haf kep' my ol' heart from breaking, I expect. Yas, I know, now, that there is such a sing as proke hearts,” he averred.

“Pappy, I —”

“What?” asked he.

“I don't know what I'm going to do now. I got to work for my living, I expect. There is not enough left for —”

“ You’ll nefer work for you’ keep while I’ve got a dollar,” said the old man. “ I owe you that much for — for —”

She liked that. She was sitting on a low stool at his feet, her elbow on his knee — her favorite attitude. She crowded a little closer.

“ Pappy,” she said presently, “ let me come and keep your house.”

“ Do you mean that? ” asked the old man joyously.

“ Yes! ” she said.

“ But why? That’s hard work for a gal that’s not used to it.”

“ Oh, maybe I want to be where Seffy was. For — some day — some day — he’ll come back and I — want to be there — to ask his pardon.”

They were silent for a while and then the old man said huskily:

“ You shall. You shall sleep in Seffy’s bed. You shall look in his little cracked looking-glass. You shall set in his place at the table. You shall be my Seffy! And we’ll wait for

him together and we'll beseast his pardon — when he comes — when he comes."

"May I ride his mare — and plow with her?"

"You — you — you?" he questioned in his ecstasy. "Ken you? — say — do you sink you ken?"

"Yes," she said very softly. "If you will let me, I will be all and everything Seffy was to you. I took him from you. Let me do my best to replace him. It is for that — that, only, that I have cared. We shall rent this house and that will help — for I know you have been getting poor, too — and — and — if you will take it — I — I — want to give you — the pasture-field — for — oh, for Seffy's sake. Will you take it?" For he had demurred. "For Seffy's sake — just as you would take it from him — and as he would give it to you — if he were ali — here? I want to be both son and daughter to you. Let me be Seffy and myself too! It is much — but let me try."

But he had caught that little slip of the tongue, and was dumb.

They sat silent by the fire for a long time then. Presently the old man rose and lifting her he said, with a smile such as she had never seen on his face:

“Yas — for Seffy’s sake — come! *Now!*”

It was night. But he led her from her own house to his. And that night she slept in Seffy’s bed.

One of Sally’s duties was the nightly reading of the *Farm Journal*. And just now this paper, edited by a gentleman who knew nothing about farming — and by him edited well — was full of the great meeting of the National Farmers’ League of the United States of America, which was in session at Omaha.

“By far the most intelligent and interesting paper of the session, thus far,” Sally read one night, “was that on *The Proper Succession of Crops in Maryland* by the youthful president of the Kansas State

League, Mr. ——” Sally rose suddenly and vanished to the kitchen where there was a light.

“What was it?” asked the old man when she returned.

“I — I choked,” said Sally quite truthfully, “and went for a drink.”

“Yas — don’t read no more. We’ll find out about the succession to-morrow night. But what was the smart feller’s name?”

She pretended to look for it, and when she pretended to have found it:

“Mr.— S. P. Brown,” she read.

“A Kansas man — about Maryland! Huh!”

But that night, after Seffy’s father was in bed, Sally wrote a pitiful letter — perhaps the first she had ever written:

“Dear Seffy (it ran)

Please come home. Come as soon as you get this. Your pappy wants you. He is old and sorry, so please come right away.

Sephenijah P. Baumgartner, Senior.”

But the envelop was addressed to

“Mr. S. P. Baumgartner, Jr.,
President Kas. State League,
Kansas.”

The post-mistress smiled indulgently as Sally handed in the letter the next day.

“A long way off,” she said.

“Yes,” said Sally, fidgeting with her bonnet. “How soon do you think it will get there?”

The post-mistress reflected.

“About a week,” she said then.

“So long?”

But, as a matter of fact, she had thought it would take longer. Kansas was a vague place in those days, and a vast distance away.

“Well,” said the post-mistress comfortably, “mebby not quite so long. But better not count much on its getting there sooner. I’ll give it a good start. I’ll put it in the mail bag now.”

“Thank you,” said Sally.

She watched her put it into the bag and

then went dreaming home, and for all of the two weeks of waiting she was very happy — dreaming always. Poor girl — she had made her life so unhappy that joy seemed divine. She was sure of Seffy. Sometimes she wondered with a blush and a start if he might not come himself in answer. She would not have been surprised to have him steal up behind her — that was his way, she remembered — and call out softly her name. So she went about almost on tiptoes so that she might hear him if he should. It was a little difficult to keep it from the inquisitive old man, who did not quite understand her sudden happiness. But she did it.

And, finally, the two weeks were up. She was quite sure Seffy would not waste a moment with his answer. And he might use that mysterious instrument, the telegraph, which she understood would not take more than an hour from Kansas. She supposed his message, even if he used the telegraph, would come to the post-office.

The ceremonial of a letter, with simple people, is as much a matter of concern as a treaty between two nations. And now, as she dressed herself in her best clothes to go to the post-office, she felt, somehow, as if she were to be in Seffy's personal presence, and must be as immaculate as always. She wondered how he would address her — forgetting that his answer must come to the one whose name she had signed. She had heard of various most dear head-lines to letters. I am afraid she blushed at all this. For, as she looked in the glass, she saw a face so radiant that she looked again to identify it.

So, all the more, she dressed herself with the same care she would have taken were she going to him instead of to the post-office for his letter. She remembered what he had said about her hair, and she ventured to pull it about her face, much as it had been that night in the dark parlor. But at the thought of that the tears came slowly into her eyes. She had been very happy that night. It was all

the happiness she had ever known, it seemed now. She dried her eyes and then she sat at the table where Seffy had often sat, and looked again in his broken mirror. The radiance was quenched. Her face was pale and thin now. She thought of it quite as if he were soon to see it.

“I wonder if he’ll think me handsome, now?” She shook her head doubtfully at the face she saw in the glass. “No, I have no red cheeks no more — and my eyes are bigger — and my lips thinner — and my hair is paler — and my hands —”

She remembered how he had kissed them, and put her head down and sobbed. They did not seem fit to be kissed now — nor worth kissing.

But the post-mistress liked her better that way and so do I. For she had acquired a daintiness that was almost immaculate.

As soon as Sally came, the post-mistress smiled and shook her head. For she had understood what the letter contained quite as if

she had seen it. And she had watched anxiously for the answer.

“Not yet,” she said compassionately.

Sally’s legs weakened and she clutched at the little shelf before her. It took a moment to swallow the thing in her throat. Then she murmured:

“It’s two weeks.”

“Yes. But he’d have to be pretty prompt to get it here by this time.”

Sally had been sure of this promptness. It never occurred to her to doubt. *She* would not have wasted a minute. She turned hopelessly away.

“Perhaps to-morrow!” said the kind post-mistress.

Sally veered, smiling.

“You think so?”

“Perhaps. One can never tell. Don’t worry, dear. You see the address was very vague and it may be some time before they find him.”

“You don’t think it is too late?”

“ I hope not, dear.”

She had not thought of that before. She had fancied him waiting for some such recall. But, of course, he had formed other ties — he would be glad to forget *her*. *He might be married !* Of course he was ! Otherwise he could not be a president !

“ I guess it’s too late,” she said again.

“ I would not think that. The address was very vague. But, after you were gone, I took the precaution to put a return address on the envelop, and if he does not get it, it will come back ; but that will take some little time.”

There was nothing the next day nor the next, nor for the many days afterward that she went to the post-office. She no longer dressed up for the trip, and she was glad now she had not told his father.

For a while she had to lock herself in her room when the desire came on her to go to the post-office. And then she remained away three days, then a week, and then the post-mistress admitted that the letter had had time

to be returned. She must not give up though. Strange things happen, sometimes, with letters.

The letter had been returned, the post-mistress had it then. But she pityingly thought it best that Sally should wait for it still, while she tried to send it back to him.

Otherwise it was very much as Sally had planned and hoped, save that she was a bit sadder. She kept Seffy's father's house, as, perhaps, no house was ever kept before. She had not been famous for the keeping of her own house in the days of her coquettishness. Her grandmother had attended to this—and then a maid who interpreted her faultlessly. But now her own hands did all—and did it with love. And she did replace Seffy—and more. For she plowed, and, after a brief apprenticeship, no one did it better. The bay mare was as kind to Sally as she had been to Seffy. Nothing in his life had ever been so sweet to the old man as those rests when they met.

And no food was ever so piquant as that eaten under the trees at their nooning.

Sally still went to the post-office, and the post-mistress still had her letter where she could have put her hand upon it, though she mercifully concealed this.

But there was no hope. Not a word of confidence had passed between Sally and the kind post-mistress, but each knew that the other understood quite as if their confidence was complete. So that it was as if they spoke of an old matter when Sally said, one day:

“Yes — I guess it’s too late. He’s married.”

“I wouldn’t think so, if I were you, till I heard it from him,” said the compassionate woman behind the counter. “I thought so once. He went to war. I heard that he was killed. I married another man — just — oh, just because! Then he came back. I have always been sorry.”

Something filled the speaker’s eyes — and Sally, with the dumb intuition of the primitive

nature, stood there a long time and said only,
“Thank you.”

But after that hope rose and lived again.

That night the post-mistress received, from Washington, the address of the Kansas State League of Farmers' Clubs, and put it on the face of the returned letter and sent it forth again.

XV

SHALL SEFFY ENTER AT THIS CUE?

Winter had come again — the fifth one. They sat together in the great hearth of the kitchen, in their characteristic attitude when before a fire. The hickory logs sputtered savagely, but sent out to them, nevertheless, a grateful warmth. Their faces and bodies glowed in the fervor of it. And there is nothing like this to put one at peace with all the world.

“Sally,” said the old man, “this is nice.”

“Very nice,” agreed Sally.

But also there is nothing like this to send one’s memory backward. And this it was doing for both of them.

“Eferybody don’t haf no such fire to-night.” And the everybody he thought of as he sighed was — Seffy.

“No, not everybody,” sighed Sally, propping her head upon his knee.

“Sally — who do you mean by eferybody?”

“Just one person,” admitted Sally, “the same one you mean.”

“Yas,” said Seffy’s father very softly, and then they were silent.

“Mebby some’s got no homes — and out freezing to-night,” the old man said presently.

“I hope not,” said Sally. “We could take them in here if we knew where they are — couldn’t we, pappy?”

But that last note was the one which dams up tears.

“Yas — if we knowed where they air — my God — if we chust knowed where they air! Sally, don’t you nefer turn no one away from the door on a cold winter’s night. You don’t know who it might be!”

“I’ll never turn any one away from the door!” said Sally with emotion.

“That’s right, Sally. Some’s dead. I’d rather be dead than haf no home.”

“And I,” agreed Sally.

“Nor no friends.”

Sally nodded.

“Sally, how long is it sence you was married?”

“More than four years — nearly five, pappy.”

“My! but sings is changed!” said the old man. “Efen the sun don’t seem so bright no more.”

“Yes, things are changed,” said the girl.

“Yit it must be chust an idee. Why, the Bible says that summer and winter shall not change tell eferysing come to pass — eferysing — eferysing —” Then his voice broke. “Yit — yit — yit it’s one sing ain’t come to pass and it seems like it’s nefer going to. It’s better sence you come. But yit the house is damp — and shifery,” — he shivered himself — “and empty — like it was a funeral about all the time. Yit it’s no one dead — no one’s

dead — he's *not* dead — chust gone. You said so — you said it first! And some day he'll come back and we'll git on our knees and beg his pardon. But it's so long — oh, my God — so long! Oh, Seffy — Seffy — little Seffy — I got a pain in my breast about you! You was all I had. Come back to me — come back! I'm a ol' man. And I'm sorry — sorry — and broke — broke down. But if you'll come back — Sally, do you think he'll haf a scar on his face?"

Something stifled his utterance. The girl put out a soft hand to comfort him.

"Some day we shall know — see! Be brave!"

"Yas — yas — that's easy to say. But you nefer struck no one right in the face — when they was looking up at you — in that pleading kind of a way!"

She said piteously, "No."

"Then you don't know nossing about it! Oh, my God! if you'd had it before you for more than four years — like a picture —

morning and evening — day and night —
everywhere! The blood on him — and the
bed and me!”

“Pappy, I have done more — I have hurt
him worse than you did — I broke — his
heart!” whispered the girl. “Oh, I should
have thought — there was no one like him —
but I let him go. If he were here now —”

They sat silent then until the old man said:

“Ah well! Come, Sally, it’s bedtime.”

“Yes.”

This meant that it was time for their
prayer, which they always said in each other’s
arms, there, before the great fire. So Sally
slipped to the floor, and they folded their
hands each in the other. And, after “Our
Father” was done, came this — rude, simple,
but not less a prayer; for in the five years of
Seffy’s absence it had passed into a formula.

“God, find Seffy, whereever he may be, for
Thou seest all the world, and put it into his
heart to come back to those who have repented
these many years; make him merciful to the

old and the evil-tempered, and yet, if this be not in Thy infinite purposes, O God, we bend our heads in submission, for it is Thy punishment for our sin; but send some word or sign, that our hearts may be comforted, and Thy will be done — Amen!”

And while this was being prayed a face came to the window in answer — a hand brushed away the snow that the eyes might see better. And then a head, crowned with pale hair, was uncovered — reverently.

Sally looked up. Something as irresistible as a magnet drew her eyes to that face in the window.

As they got up the old man saw Sally's white face and staring eyes.

“Sally,” he said, “you look like you'd seen a ghost!”

There was a knock on the outer door.

“Bring him in, whoever he is, Sally, and keep him till he's not hungry no more — nor cold — nor sorry —”

Sally did not speak, but went, still with

that strange look in her eyes, as if she had indeed seen a ghost.

He heard her pass through the hall and open the door — then a little cry — some begging — silence — a sob. After what seemed a long time, Sally returned alone. She did not come to his knee again, but stood panting before him. He could not see her face. She did not mean that he should — the fire was all about her — illuminating her — but there.

“Where is he?” asked Seffy’s father.

“Out there.”

He turned at the strange throbbing of her voice. And then he saw her face, lighted with a great radiance.

There was a moment of silence. In the fire-light she was as beautiful as a figure of Greuze. That vagrant thing, joy, had come back. But whence? How?

“Sally, what’s the matter? I nefer saw you look so. My God! what’s the matter?”

“Shut your eyes!”

The light of the fire flooded her face now

and made it too wonderful to close his eyes upon.

“Sally — for the Lord’s sake —” pleaded the old man.

“Shut your eyes,” she glanced over her shoulder, “and be happy.”

“Don’t, Sally.”

She slipped to the floor and knelt at his feet.

“Pappy, to-night I am a magician. To-night I can give you anything you want. But you must ask for what you want *most*.”

She smiled lovingly upon him.

“Shut your eyes and ask.”

Poor Old Baumgartner did as she commanded. And, for a long moment, there was silence. Then a tear dropped on his face. For in the firelight poor, sad, sorry Old Baumgartner was making a picture, too: a white, old, hopeless, piteous, pleading face, framed in masses of hair, shaggily gray when Seffy went away, senilely white now. The sunken eyes spoke of hastening peace after



sorrow, and the whole piteous figure begged for those tears which fell upon its face.

“Oh, pappy, excuse me,” said the voice which had gathered to itself all the music of the life he thought broken, “but you have so often called me beautiful, that I want to tell you now that *you* have the most beautiful face I have ever seen! Pappy — pappy, dear pappy, God bless you!”

And her lips descended upon his, her dear fingers closed his eyes once more, her handkerchief wiped away the tear she had dropped upon his face and others which had followed it, and she said:

“Are your eyes shut? Yes! Now, ask for anything you want on earth or in heaven — and you shall have it. Do not be afraid! The very dearest thing you can think.”

“Seffy —” he whispered brokenly — “Seffy and you — and me — together!”

“Presto! Open your eyes!” cried Sally.

He did so — and there, kneeling before him, was Seffy — and one arm was about

Sally, the other reaching out to him — not quite certain how it would be received, but with the old smile of Seffy. He seemed bigger, and he had a young beard on cheek and lip, and he appeared quite worthy to be the president of the Kansas State League of Farmers' Clubs.

Old Baumgartner looked without a word, at first to be sure, then to fill all his being. And then he rose to his feet and shook off all the years that had accumulated during Seffy's absence, and, when his arms were about them both, and theirs about him, their joint shadow rose and filled all the room and ceiling — blotting out all else. And, lo, it was not three shadows, but one!

"Seffy," asked his father, while his arm went about his shoulders with the unconsciousness of what seemed yesterday. "how did you efer git president of that sing? — what is it?"

"I fought for it, pappy."

"You? Gosh-a'mighty!"

They both laughed happily.

“Yes — you and Sally were right — I needed to learn to fight. I went out into the world where you sent me — thank you both — and found life. And I found it a fight from start to finish. Only with some there is no quarter.”

“But not with you,” said Sally.

“But not with me,” agreed Seffy. “That is not necessary to success.”

“Gosh! Seffy,” said his father, “you are as wise as Ol’ Kellerman, the preacher. Say, you remember him?”

“I remember everything — the smallest — and it is all precious, pappy — more precious than you can know. If one were never to leave this Happy Valley, one might live and die as I began. And, if one should never learn better it is good — good! But it is not the life of the world out there. And, for me, it is gone for ever! In one way I am sorry. For the world has nothing to exchange for these little things. Out there my heart has

always yearned for them and always will. You and Sally must keep them as they are — nay, as they were. And I shall live in them and with them and we shall be happier for them.”

During all this Seffy’s arms and hands had been busy in the old fashion of the days of their simplicity. It was good to see and better to be!

“I don’t believe it!” cried his happy old father, returning his caresses. “You ain’t forgot a sing! You chust the same — except the dictionary words — chust the same — our Seffy! Ain’t so, Sally? Why don’t you talk, anyway?”

“Just — the — same,” said Sally. But the tears were in her dear eyes and she knew that her words were for the father and not the son — for him she understood that it would never be the same — quite, and it was she who had sent him forth to lose the simplicity of the Happy Valley.

“Not a bit — you ain’t changed!” re-

peated the father, as if saying it might make it so.

“Yes, I am,” laughed Seffy.

“You ain’t!” said his father.

“Oh, yes! Sam couldn’t get away with me now!”

“Nor Sally, hah?”

“Nor Sally.”

“Don’t,” pleaded Sally, “you hurt me!”

“You see,” Seffy went on, “you notice the changes in me, but not in yourselves. Shall I tell you about them? For none of us will ever again be quite as we were. Shall I tell you about the changes in you?”

“No,” begged Sally quickly, with drooping head.

“They are beautiful! All beautiful!”

“No!” she repeated.

His father had dropped into his chair, still happy but very tired. For, you know, great happiness tires one, too.

“Seffy,” he sighed, “why did you wait so long — tell I got old?”

“There is still one thing you haven’t noticed about me, or spoken of, if you did, in which I am not changed a bit.”

“What?”

It was Sally’s quick voice — Sally, who thought she had already inventoried every difference between this Seffy and the old one — Sally, who hungered for the least thing in which he might be unchanged!

“I’m stubborn as ever — thank you, pappy!”

“Goshens! That’s so! You was a stubborn little idiot!”

“*We* were,” laughed Seffy.

“If it hadn’t been for that — ”

“I wonder what would have happened? Do you know?” Seffy said to Sally.

“No,” sighed Sally.

“I think,” said Seffy, with a grace and tenderness he never had in the old days, “that we get and lose what we deserve — to get and lose. I didn’t deserve you then, dear. Perhaps I do now?”

Sally said nothing — she could not. Her face was deep in his overcoat. And she was making it so very wet — that, presently, she lifted her face, and, with her handkerchief, dried it.

“That is the sweetest thing you have ever said to me — and it breaks my heart — for I don’t deserve it — that one little, simple word — dear!”

“Well, well,” broke in happy Old Baumgartner, drying his own eyes, “is this a time for weeping and wailing and gnashing of the teeth? The prodigal has returned. We got to find a nice fat calf.”

“Well,” laughed Seffy, not relinquishing Sally, “what is the first thing? I’m ready for work. I’m used to it!”

“To-morrow, Seffy,” said his father briskly, “you better let Sally marry you. Remember she bought you.”

He gave Sally time to blush, and Seffy time to find both her hands and her lips, and then he finished:

“ And make it early — mebbby the first sing in the morning. In the afternoon we’ll take down the fence. All three of us. It’s waiting for us. Sally kep’ it waiting. Ain’t so, Sally? ”

Sally affirmed this.

